The Woman Alone

MABEL HERBERT URNER

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The Woman Alone

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The Woman Alone

By
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Author of "The Journal of a Neglected Wife."

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I

AN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION

THE early dusk of a grey day was gathering in the long corridors of the Metropolitan Museum. Margaret hurried by the statues at the entrance, past the casts of early Roman gladiators, up the wide marble steps to the art galleries.

The place was not crowded; it was the smaller and more leisurely throng of a "pay day" that strolled through the rooms. In the Flemish Gallery an art student was copying Van Dyck's Duke of Lenox. Further on, another easel with a half-finished sketch stood before a Rembrandt head.

At the entrance of the Catherine Wolfe Collection, Margaret paused and swept the room with a tremulous glance. He was standing before a picture at the far end. Instantly he

glanced up, as though conscious of her presence. Now he was hurrying towards her.

She held out her hand with an uncertain smile. A strained silence followed the murmured words of greeting. They turned into the next gallery. She was intensely conscious that he was gazing down at her as she walked beside him. She put out her hand with a murmured,

"Oh, don't — please don't!"

"Forgive me. It's been so long."

"Three days?"

"Yes," bitterly, "three days."

A group of sightseers came by, intent on their catalogues. Just his touch on her arm, as he drew her a little aside that they might pass, made her pulses throb. Even after they had gone by, she still leaned slightly against him, and when she drew away they were both conscious of the movement.

It seemed to Margaret that every moment she was with him was weighted with an intense, thrilled consciousness of his slightest act.

As they passed into the next gallery, he stopped abruptly.

"I want to talk to you, Margaret. We can't talk here. Let me take you to dinner to-night."

"But I thought —" in a low voice.

"That there was to be only an occasional meeting in the Park or gallery? I'm going to Denver to-morrow."

"To Denver?" The words were hardly more than a whisper.

"That's why I'm asking this."

"For — long?" A sick tremor was creeping over her.

"For several weeks — perhaps longer. The Edgerton case opens there Monday."

"And it's necessary for you to go?"

"I've decided to go."

"It is *necessary*?"

"I think it is."

"On account of the Edgerton case?"

"No."

"Oh," with a hysterical little laugh. "Do you think that will help?"

"It may."

"Then wouldn't it have been better to go without — without even seeing me this afternoon?"

"Yes."

They walked on in silence, a throbbing silence. Presently he stopped her before a small Inness landscape.

"The colouring in that is good."

She made no answer.

"And that figure through the distance — the shadows against the tree trunk —"

She made a gesture of impatience.

"And that damp, marsh-like effect of the ground is well expressed."

"Oh, don't!" It was almost a sob.

"Then will you go with me to dinner? I told you we couldn't talk here."

"Oh, yes — yes, anything would be better than this — now."

"Then come."

Though her heart seemed weighted, she thrilled at his tone of command, at his imperative touch on her arm as he guided her towards the entrance.

Outside it was almost dark. The damp air blew coldly into their faces as they came from the heated building. Through the now heavy mist the street lamps shone in yellow blurs.

He motioned to a cab.

"No, I would rather walk — at least for a while."

"You're not tired?"

She shook her head.

"Then we'll walk down through the Park."

They turned back into the Park, which was now almost deserted. The benches along the pathways were empty; the air was too chill and raw for loitering. Lamps gleamed palely here and there among the trees, lighting up a few skeleton branches and leaving the rest massed in obscurity.

A rustic bridge led over a small lake. Silently they looked down at the dark water, across which lay a golden bar from a solitary light on the bank. Something white shone from beside a projecting rock — two white ducks huddling close together, their heads under their wings.

The quiet and peace of it all seemed in strange contrast to the roaring, glaring city just beyond. And there came to Margaret the longing to *hold* that moment — the rest and security of it — as she leaned beside him against the rail.

Reluctantly she let him lead her on. As they neared the exit, the towering buildings with their myriad lights seemed like menacing sentinels — lest she try to put aside for more than a moment the problems and difficulties that lay before her.

The walk through the Park had been almost in silence, and now, as they entered the hotel res-

taurant, ablaze with lights, Margaret felt herself shuddering away from the thought of words. There was still a sense of nearness and understanding in their silence that she felt words would dispel.

She was glad of the hovering presence of the waiter, of the need to order that kept his attention from her for a little while. He had secured a table in a secluded corner of the room, and when at length the waiter hurried off they were practically alone.

Their eyes met. For a moment she looked at him unwaveringly, then faltered before the unveiled tenderness in his glance. A faint colour crept into her cheeks.

"Are you tired?" gently.

"A little. And let's not talk about to-morrow — not just yet."

"No, dear, not yet."

He understood her mood. She wanted to put it off — to have at least part of their evening as though to-morrow were not to be.

The orchestra in the next room was playing a haunting Hungarian melody, and to Margaret the minor strains seemed like the cry of her own

heart in an impassioned protest against an implacable fate.

She sipped her wine with the hope that it would give her courage, that it would take away some of the chill weight that lay upon her.

"You'll try to eat something?" he glanced at her untouched oysters.

She nodded.

They tried to talk, tried to seem natural, to ignore the thing that filled both their minds. But it was forced and strained, and it was Margaret herself who gave up the effort, who swept aside her own request by an abrupt,

"And you think it will help?"

"I hope it will help."

"And when you come back, you think we will have ceased to care?"

"Margaret, you know I don't think that. But I hope in the long absence we will have time to think more clearly — to realise how impossible it is."

"We don't realise that now?"

"Not quite — no. I find myself constantly hoping, believing almost, that something will happen. That some way will open up, that

chance or fate will somehow bring things around. And yet, I know it's impossible. There's nothing that *could* happen that would help us — nothing that would not bring untold suffering to some one else. And we can never take our happiness that way."

"No — no," in a low voice.

"There are some things to which there are no solutions," bitterly. "I spend hours planning, scheming, and always come back to the one thing — I can never leave her. It would kill her."

A long silence. He was gazing across the room, his face tensely set. Margaret's hand trembled as she moved her wine glass back and forth.

"And when you come back —" falteringly.

"When I come back, Margaret, I hope to have more strength, strength enough —" he hesitated.

"Not to see me."

He did not answer.

"And I — I —" with a stifled sob, "where will *I* get strength? Have you thought of that?"

"More than of anything else. But you have the strength. Slight and frail as you are, you have the strongest will, the most indomitable pride of any woman I've ever known."

"And you're counting on that? You're depending on my pride to keep me up — to lash me on? Could anything be more cruel?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"For me to stay, to absorb more of your youth, your future — when I've nothing to offer you."

A sudden reckless motion of her hand swept over the wine glass. She watched the small red splash slowly spread into the white cloth. What was it symbolic of — that slowly spreading stain? What was she trying to think of?

The waiter came up, covered the cloth with a napkin and refilled her glass.

"But if I should cry out that I could not bear it? If my pride and strength should fail? If I should break down — throw everything aside and send for you?"

A sudden light came into his eyes as he leaned toward her.

"*Margaret!*" The word was like a caress.

Involuntarily he covered the hand she stretched across the table, then almost at once released it. Slowly the light went from his eyes, and they were again sombre.

Margaret felt as though she had actually seen

the crushing down of something within him — as though, with his strong veined hands, he had subdued and broken some struggling thing. When at length he answered her, his voice was almost cold.

"Should you ever send for me — you know I will come. But I know, Margaret, that you will never send."

"Another goad to my pride," bitterly, "another way of lashing me on! You are doing it thoroughly — making quite sure —"

"Don't, dear," gently. "We've only a few more moments and bitterness won't help us."

Only a few moments more! She put her hand to her throat. She had not realised that it was late, that many diners had come and gone since they were there. Only a few moments more! Something like terror — a panic-stricken terror swept through her.

"Oh, I can't bear it! Say something to help me — to make it easier!"

"What must I say, Margaret? What *can* I say?" Again he covered her hand with his. "There is nothing I can say or do — except to love you enough to leave you. If I loved you less — if I respected you less — do you think I

would go away now? Oh, Margaret, Margaret, don't you *know* it's because I love you so much?"

With averted face she struggled with the choking sobs.

When at length they rose from the table, Margaret was trembling so that for a moment she wondered if she would have the strength to cross the room. He took her cloak from the waiter and put it around her. He would never let a waiter help her with her wraps.

Outside, a cab was waiting. She heard him give her address to the driver. It was not far — in a few moments they would be there. And he would leave her at the door. Only a few moments more — *a few moments!*

She was leaning back in the shadow of the cab, her hands clasped tight in her lap. She must not cry out — she must not cling to him! She was saying that over and over to herself.

Suddenly he leaned forward and took both her hands in his.

"Margaret, I want to leave you before we reach your hotel. I want to tell you good-bye here — not in a glaring hotel lobby."

She made a faint motion of assent. And then,

very gently, he drew her towards him, until she lay within his arms.

"I love you, Margaret. I *love* you!" For a moment longer he held her in silence. And that was all. Abruptly he released her.

Then, without stopping the cab, he threw open the door and sprang out.

II

THE WIFE

DEAR GRAHAM:

Now that you are really coming home, and won't think I am trying to hurry you, I can say that these five weeks have seemed like years. I have not known what to do with myself or my time. The few days' illness I wrote you of last week, was brought on by sheer loneliness and longing for you.

You persuaded me not to go with you because of the hardships of the trip. As though anything could be so hard as the loneliness of these weeks! Oh, dear, I have missed you so! Promise that you will never leave me so long again. I can stand any hardship but that of separation from you.

And your letters — they have been so short and unsatisfying. Mere notes about the case and nothing — almost nothing about yourself. But then I know you have been very busy and I ought not to complain.

I have had your room, the library, hall and dining room, thoroughly gone over, the ceilings retouched and all the wood work and floors re-oiled. I have done this because I know you hate the disturbance of house-cleaning — and because it has given me something to do.

Max misses you almost as much as I do. He wanders restlessly about the house, sniffs at your chair in the dining room and seems a very disconsolate dog. Yesterday, when I was going over your clothes closet and straightening out your things, Ellen called me away for a few moments.

When I came back Max had dragged down your bath robe and was lying on it. I tried to take it from under him, but he growled most fiercely. And Ellen — even Ellen asks anxiously every day just when you will return. So you see we all are wanting you to come home, dear — Max, Ellen, and your wife.

MARY.

FOR the last half hour he had held the letter. Now he slowly folded it, returned it to his pocket, and once more gazed out at the flying fields and telegraph poles.

As another train whizzed past, his face was reflected in the momentarily darkened window. He was thinner and more haggard; the five weeks had left their mark.

"And do you think that will help?" How those words haunted him. No, it had not helped. He was coming back with a greater longing, a more consuming need of her than ever. Work — work — he would go on fighting it with work — ceaseless, feverish work! He chafed against the enforced idleness of these two days' travelling. To-morrow he would be in his office.

But before the solace of to-morrow's work — lay his home-going this evening. He must meet Mary kindly, he must try to respond to her caresses. The letter in his pocket, all the letters he had received in these five weeks were only

additional proofs of her love and trust, her pitiful dependence upon him. Whatever the cost of dissembling — he must not fail her.

It was growing dusk. The porter came through and turned on the lights. The dreary stretch of darkening fields outside, emphasised the atmosphere of comfort, of seclusion, of warmth and intimacy of the gleaming polished wood, mirrors, and plush fittings of the speeding car.

For a few moments he leaned back and gave himself up to the thoughts and dream pictures he had been fighting against all day. She was there beside him; now and then her hair brushed his shoulder as he bent toward her, and sometimes she would lay her small ungloved hand on his, as she drew his attention to something out the window. She was a little tired with the long trip. Her hair was slightly loosened and fell carelessly around the small delicate face, which seemed pale against the background of the dark velvet seat.

Abruptly he rose, strode back to the observation car, where he walked restlessly up and down the aisle. How could he hope to forget if he yielded to thoughts like these?

It was almost seven when at length, over an hour late, they drew into Jersey City. With the aid of a porter he shrugged into his overcoat, gathered up his bags, and hurried out through the station to the waiting ferry — glad of the inclemency that drove the other passengers inside and left him alone.

The scattered lights in the towering buildings seemed like the still glowing frameworks of some great pyrotechnic display. It was about this same hour, one evening, that she had crossed the ferry with him — just for the effect of lights. Desperately he threw the thought from him. Was every hour to be stained with some memory? Had he gained so little control of his thoughts?

A creaking of chains, a heavy jarring thud — the boat had landed. He threw his bags into the first cab, and was whirled off towards his home. In a few moments he must meet his wife. He must think of something to say — he must not seem abstracted. He must do his best to make her happy.

But when he ran up the wide stone steps, it was with a sense of entering some one else's house — it seemed strangely foreign and unfamiliar. The heavy door yielded to his latch-key.

He had hardly put down the bags and thrown off his coat, when Mary came running down the stairs.

"Oh, Graham — Graham!" She threw herself in his arms — kissing him again and again; and he hated himself for his coldness and his desire to draw away.

"Oh, I thought you'd never come! I was growing frightened. What made the train so late?"

"I wrote you it might be late; that through train often is."

"Oh, I know — but not so late as this! And I wanted to come to meet you — why did you write me not to?"

"Just because, dear, I was afraid it *would* be late. I didn't want you waiting down there so long."

"As if I would have minded that! But I mustn't keep you standing here — I know you're tired. Won't you come in to dinner, just as you are? Ellen has it all ready, and you're too tired to dress."

"No, I'll not dress, but I must freshen up some. It won't take me long."

She followed him up to his room, hovered

about him, laid out his things, full of solicitude for his comfort.

Restive under her anxious attentions, he was glad when Max came bounding into the room, barking and leaping wildly about him in frenzied joy.

"Down, Max! Good old boy!"

"Oh, Max has missed you so!" And then suddenly she turned and threw her arms about him. "Oh, Graham, Graham, you won't go away again without taking me? Say that you won't! I couldn't bear another five weeks like these — promise me that you never will!"

"Why, no — of course not, Mary. Why, dear — what's the matter?" She was sobbing brokenly, her face hidden against his arm. "Don't, dear — don't do that. I'm not going away again!" He stroked her hair awkwardly. "There now — take Max down with you, and I'll freshen up and come down in a moment."

When she had gone, he locked his door and strode back and forth across the room with bent head. It was going to be harder even than he had thought.

During the dinner he tried to tell her of his trip, and to seem interested in her account of the

house and servants. She was much worried about his health. He assured her that he was merely tired and would be all right in a few days. "Shall we have the coffee in the library, to-night? You'll be more comfortable and can rest better there."

"Why yes, Mary, if you wish. But I'm afraid I'll have to go down to the office for a little while this evening, there are some letters I want to get off —"

"To-night — when you are so tired! Surely, Graham, you're not going to the office to-night?"

"I'm afraid I must, Mary, for a little while."

"But can't you write the letters here?"

"There are some files I must go over — some data I must have about a contract."

"And can't you do that, to-morrow?"

"If I get it off to-night it will reach Harden Saturday. If I wait until to-morrow they won't get it until Monday, and that will be too late for the bids. They must get in their bids on that work by twelve o'clock Monday."

Half an hour later he left the house. He walked on, with bent head, unheeding the fine mist that was falling. Part of it had been true. Some points, as to a former contract, must reach

his clients Saturday. But a telegram or even a special delivery would have served his purpose.

The thought of going to the office, to-night, had come as a sudden compelling impulse to avoid the long evening in the library. Even as he spoke he had hated the partial untruth, and now he was filled with a bitter contempt of his weakness.

What would be the future if the mere thought of spending an evening with Mary had driven him to such subterfuge? Had his love for another woman made the mere companionship of his wife unbearable? No. Fiercely he denied that. He had a great respect, a great tenderness for Mary — which nothing could ever alter. Her presence could never be distasteful. He found himself repeating this over and over again.

He walked many blocks before, at length, he took a car. It was just nine when he reached his offices. The great building loomed up dark and deserted. He greeted the night watchman who sat near the door, half dozing, his chair tilted back. The elevators were not running, and his every step echoed through the silent, dimly lit corridors as he hurried up the stairs.

At the seventh floor he turned to the right,

down a long passage, unlocked a door, passed through the outer rooms to his private office. The blinds were up and an electric sign across the street shone through the windows, flooding the place with a pale ghostly light.

A strange atmosphere of awaiting, of expectancy, seemed over everything. All the instruments of the busy activities of the day — the typewriter, the mimeograph, the telephone — now seemed tensely waiting for the onslaught of the morrow.

Some unanswered letters lay in a wire basket on his stenographer's desk, with her neatly arranged pencils and note books. The small nickle clock she always kept there was ticking away, a loud insistent sound in the still room.

He opened his desk, turned on the green shaded light that hung over it; took down some files, found the contract and wrote the letter. He sealed and stamped it with a sense of relief, not on account of the letter, but because he had fulfilled the mission on which he had said he must come.

And now the next few moments he claimed for his own. He crossed over to a large safe near the window, and swiftly worked the combination.

The heavy door swung open. He unlocked the inner compartment, and then took from his pocket a key to a small secret drawer. A bundle of letters, a long white glove, a lace handkerchief, some faded flowers and a picture in its tissue paper sheath lay before him.

His hand trembled as he drew out the picture. The delicate profile, the slight droop of the head, the sensitive mouth, the inexpressible sadness and sweetness of the face. "Oh, Margaret! Margaret!" The whispered word sounded strangely in that still place.

How often in these weeks of absence he had tried to fix each delicate feature in his memory — but something always eluded him. He took the picture over and held it under the green shaded desk light. Never had he felt so strongly the haunting sadness of the face. The lips seemed almost quivering into a cry of her loneliness — her need of him.

Her *need* of him — nothing made it harder than his realisation of that. All her life she had been alone, a frail, shrinking, super-sensitive woman forced to meet life alone — to fight her own way from early girlhood. She had done it bravely, courageously, but with a silent suffer-

ing, a constant flinching and recoiling that had made her withdraw more and more within herself.

He had first met her through the settling of an estate of her uncle's, her only near relative, who had left her a small interest in some mining property. The family had tried to protest the legacy, small as it was. And Margaret's pride, and her willingness to relinquish her interest rather than have the publicity of a suit, had aroused his keenest sympathy. That had been over three years ago, and he knew now that he had loved her from the very beginning.

And her work — the drudgery of a free lance writer — special articles, book reviews and short stories. She had never complained, but he knew how hard it was for her, how she shuddered away not so much from the work itself as from the need to "market" it.

And yet he was powerless to help her; he could not shield or protect or provide for her in any way. Her fierce pride rose before him always — an insurmountable thing. Why should he go on, he thought bitterly, striving to increase his wealth, when he could use none of it to help the woman he loved?

As he stood there, still looking down at the picture, his arm touched the telephone by his desk, the slight jar causing the faintest whisper of the bell. The telephone! All through the last year it had had for him a new and wonderful meaning — 2589 Gramercy — her number! *Her* voice! Every blue telephone sign in the city had come to mean that to him.

And now — even now — he had only to take down that receiver and give that number. . . . The thought thrilled through him. How near it brought her — how it seemed to break down the barriers of all these weeks. And yet — the lines around his mouth grew tense — he could never call that number again. He must face the future, knowing that always by his desk was an instant means of reaching her — that he could never use. And when he walked home, wherever he went — every shop and drug store would hold the same possibility.

And the same condition, he knew, confronted Margaret. She must make the same struggle — with the same temptation always near. She had told him once, after a slight misunderstanding which had estranged them for a week, of the many times during that week she had gone to

the telephone, had sometimes even taken down the receiver — only to hang it back without giving the number. At the last moment her pride would keep her from it.

Unheeding the time, he sat brooding there by his desk, her picture still before him, living over the hours they had spent together. It was almost midnight when at length he rose and replaced the picture in the safe.

Before he locked the compartment, he took out for a moment the long white glove. Her own faint fragrance hung about it yet, and the soft kid seemed still to hold the delicate lines of her hand. He could almost feel her small fingers within his clasp. "Margaret — Margaret!" For a second time that night he spoke aloud her name. While the word still hung on the air, a shrill startling ring came from the telephone.

A telephone call at midnight — in his office? Mental telepathy — the power of suggestion — all that he had ever heard of it seemed flashing through his mind. Had his very longing forced her to him at this time?

"Hello!" His voice rang tense with the hope that was in him.

"Oh, Graham — I was afraid something had

happened! You said you'd be gone only a short time—and it's after twelve. Aren't you through? Can't you come home now?"

It was several seconds before he answered. His silence was so long that she repeated her questions in alarm.

Then he said quietly: "I'm sorry you were worried, Mary. I'm through and I'm leaving now."

III

A CHANCE MEETING

"IF this had not happened, if chance had not brought this about, would you have gone on — as you were?"

"Margaret, I don't know. I fought it out for six months, and there was not a day in that time that I did not turn to the telephone with an irresistible longing to call you! The letters I've written you — and torn up! The times I've walked by this hotel at night — just to be near you."

"And you would have gone on? Had it not been for this accident — we'd never have been together again?"

"I don't know. I tell you, I don't *know!* But surely you know it was for your sake I was making that fight — that I felt it was for your best good."

"And *hers!*"

"Don't, Margaret, don't be bitter now."

"No — no — I shouldn't have said that. But oh, I can't help shrinking from the thought that we are together again merely because of an accident! I can't help wishing that it was because your love was stronger than your will — than everything else!"

"And yet, if my love had been less I wouldn't have left you when I did. Can't you understand that, Margaret?"

"Yes — in a way. But oh, I have suffered so — the sleepless nights — the days of loneliness — all the time hoping, waiting, sometimes even *believing* that you would come!"

"A word from you would have brought me. You know that."

"That was the hardest part of all — to keep from saying the word. But I *could* not! If I had any vestige of pride I couldn't do that! It wasn't as if I had sent you away from me — I hadn't. You had gone because you felt it was the only way. How, then, could I send for you?"

"Yes, I realised that. I knew the strength of your pride. And yet — I never took up my mail without the hope that there might be some word. The 'phone never rang around eleven in

the morning that my heart did not leap with the thought that it might be you."

"And one morning it was!"

"One morning it was?" he demanded. "What do you mean?"

The colour rushed to her face. "I did call you one morning."

"Darling — you did? And I wasn't there?"

"Yes, you were there — you spoke to me."

"I don't understand."

"I suppose I shouldn't tell you — it seems so weak. But I couldn't help it. I longed just to hear your voice! Don't you remember one morning your telephone rang — and when you answered there was no one there? You called 'Hello!' several times — and finally hung up the receiver. Don't you remember?"

"And that was you?"

"It was the hardest thing I ever did — not to speak, to hear your voice and not answer you!"

"Margaret, you did that — and I never knew!"

"And oh, I felt that you *should* have known! If there is anything in telepathy or suggestion — it seemed that you would *feel* I was there! And you didn't? The thought never came to you?"

"No, dear, not then. I think there was a

stockholders' meeting in my office that morning, and I was very busy — perhaps that was the reason."

"So it was a stockholders' meeting that excluded any thought of me!"

"You know how quickly I would have adjourned that meeting, had I dreamed it was you."

He drew her toward him and kissed very gently her forehead and hair.

"Oh, Margaret — Margaret, these months have been so hard. There were times when I felt I couldn't go on. Often I've gotten up from my desk and walked around my office, feeling how useless it was to work. What had I to work for? It all seemed so purposeless and empty without you!"

"Oh I know — I know. I felt all that and more. Graham, I suffered so — it was so cruel!" With a sob she hid her face against his shoulder. "It was so pitifully cruel! But now — we are together again! We are together again! It seems as if nothing else in the world matters — except just that."

"Yes, dear, we are together again. And yet things are just as they were before. Nothing has been solved — no condition has been altered.

And for your sake — I am afraid of the future."

For a moment he paused. She did not speak; her face was still hid against his shoulder.

"Margaret, in the past I have been strong enough to shield you from myself. But I feel I cannot answer for the future. You must know that was why I left you, why I fought so hard to stay away."

He rose and walked to the window, stood there for several moments, and then turned and took his seat beside her again.

"There is something else I want to say now, something I feel I must say. The thought may have come to you, as it has many times to me, that should our love ever be complete — it might weaken my resolutions about her, make my sense of duty to her less. Margaret, it might do all that — but it *could not make me leave her!* The very fact that I felt myself weakening would make me more grimly determined *not* to leave her. It would in no way be her fault. Should we be swept away by our love, we must be the ones to suffer — not she!"

He was looking down at her hand that he had taken in his own, musingly tracing the veins.

"I am telling you this now, that you may never

build false hopes on something that can never be. Margaret, if I had the strength to do what I know is right and best for your happiness — I would leave you again now. Leave you in some brutal way that would make any reconciliation impossible."

"And again lash me on by my pride to silence?"

"It would be best for you."

"And you can do that now?"

"No!"

Again he rose abruptly and walked over to the window. She remained motionless, her hands lying in her lap, just as he had released them.

There was a silent whirring sound from a small clock on the mantel, then with irritating slowness it struck five.

"That simplifies things some," he commented grimly, without turning.

"How? What do you mean?"

"In the need to meet the problem of the moment, we can shirk those of the future. We might pursue that plan and lessen our responsibility. No doubt each day's difficulties will be sufficient."

She went over to the window beside him.

"Only a few moments ago you asked *me* not to be bitter!"

"Yes, I know. I'll not be."

She laid her hand on his arm.

"What is it — some early engagement with — Mrs. Whitman?"

"Yes."

"And you must go now?"

"I *should* go now."

"Then go, dear. We don't want to make this day, the day that has brought us together again, the cause of unhappiness or even disappointment to — to any one."

"I thought of that."

"Then don't be late. Don't keep her waiting. Oh, Graham, I feel so happy — so filled with the joy of just being with you again — that it is easy to be generous. I *want* to be! No — no — I shouldn't use that word — I don't mean quite that. I am in no position to be *generous* — least of all to her. I only mean — oh, I don't quite know how to express it!"

"It isn't necessary, dear. I know what you mean. I think I have very much the same feeling about it. And I can still be on time, if I go at once."

He stooped down and kissed her gently. "I suppose," with a smile that was both sad and bitter, "we might express it something like this: Under conditions that we know are wrong and that we haven't the strength to make right — we are going to do the best we can."

It was almost seven before Margaret rose from the chair by the window where she had been since he left. The room had grown dark — and still she sat there. For the first time in months she *rested.* Oh, the inexpressible peace and quiet that had come to her now. The few moments he had held her in his arms seemed to have drawn from her the anguished ache of all these months.

He had come back — he was with her again! She would see him to-morrow — the next day! Whatever the future held — they would not be wholly parted again. Nothing mattered but that. And as she sat there in the deepening dusk — there stole over her such a sense of peace, of rest, as can only come with the relaxation of some prolonged strain.

When at length she rose and flooded the room with light, the first thing that sprang into view was the telephone. How different it looked to her now! For months it had seemed to dominate

the room with its grim silence; it had been a constant torturing reminder. Now the whole atmosphere of the instrument seemed different. She knew now that over and over again it would bring to her his voice — and yet only a few hours ago she had thought it never would. Only a few hours — but they had changed for her the whole world.

If she had not gone out to-day, or if she had gone a moment earlier or a moment later! If she had not taken the subway, or even if she had walked to the right instead of the left of that crowded platform! Was it upon such trivial incidents that her happiness depended? No. She felt that it was infinitely more than a chance meeting.

All these months she had anticipated and prepared herself for some unexpected encounter. Sooner or later, in the course of things, it would come. She had pictured meeting him on the street, in the park, at the theatre. They would bow — a brief, formal salute — and pass on.

But how different it had been! In that swaying, throbbing moment when she saw him there before her, everything else was swept away. In a second he was at her side.

"Margaret!" And then he had half-led, half-carried her up the steps, out of the subway and into a passing taxi. From that first second she knew in both their minds the thought that they were together again not to separate was as instinctive as it was fixed.

But for the half-smothered exclamation of her name, no word was spoken until they had reached her apartment. To Margaret that drive was only a vague memory of a kaleidoscopic mingling of streets and buildings which wavered before her in the sunlight.

And the first half-hour in her apartment — she had no coherent memory even of that. She only knew that she had broken down completely, and that all the anguish and heartache of these months she had sobbed out in his arms.

That night, before she went to bed, she knelt for a long time by the open window, looking out over the city with its myriad lights. How often she had knelt there in the nights past — the weight of her loneliness and despair so heavy upon her that she had sent out to him voiceless cries for help. Knowing he was somewhere in that great seething city, and by some power of

thought he might feel her wordless message and come to her.

But now her thoughts became a half-formed prayer — a resolve that the great happiness that had come to her to-day should never be the cause of *bringing unhappiness to any one else.*

She repeated his words: *"Under conditions that we know are wrong and that we haven't the strength to make right — we are going to do the best we can."* Yes, they would do the best they could.

IV

TOGETHER AGAIN

THE happiness of the weeks that followed was intensified by the long period of suffering that had gone before. "Just to be together again," a phrase that was constantly on Margaret's lips, seemed to fill the whole world with joy.

They vied with each other now in accepting cheerfully the difficulties of their position. The few hours he could be with her seemed so much after the silence and emptiness of the months that had passed. Just a note or a few words over the telephone seemed enough to fill a whole day with content.

"If we might always be content with so little," he said wistfully one day.

"We will — we will!" she assured him. "After all, suffering has its salutary lesson — and we have had ours."

The first word of protest, of discontent, came

from him, in a note brought her by a messenger one morning about a month later.

Will not be able to lunch with you as we planned. Have had a rather high fever all night, and am afraid I cannot even go down to the office to-day.

If I could only see you for a few moments — but I don't know how it can be managed. Some one is constantly about, so I cannot even 'phone from here. But you can call me up. Should the maid or any one else come to the 'phone just say you are a client and wish to speak to me personally. I will have to be guarded in my answers.

How I hate the necessity for all these schemes and deceptions, and I know you do too. It is a constant humiliation to us both. Yet there seems to be no other way. I feel discouraged this morning and more than usually rebellious. I want to be with you openly, without the need for all these evasions and falsehoods.

I came down to the library this morning, and am lying on the couch here. The 'phone is in this room, and to be by it seems to bring me nearer you. Will try to send another note this evening. You must not worry. It is nothing serious. I'll be all right in a few days.

He was ill — and she could not be with him! Her heart cried out bitterly against the conditions that kept her from him now. All the mother-love, that in some degree every woman gives to the man she loves, was now aroused. She wanted to nurse him, to soothe and comfort him, to wait on and croon over him until he was well. And she could not even see him!

With eyes full of tears she turned through the telephone book. As familiar as was his office number, she had never telephoned to his home. "Whitman, Graham K. Res. 3240 River."

She went over to the 'phone. What should she say? What could she say that would cheer him? He had written that he was discouraged. She gave the number to Central. There was a long wait. Her heart beat fast. The sound of a receiver being taken from the hook, and then — his voice!

"Oh, I'm so glad you answered! I was afraid it would be some one else."

"I've been lying here watching the 'phone and wondering when it would ring. Fortunately, just at this moment I'm alone. I wonder if you know how much I've been thinking about you all morning."

"Oh, but you are ill! And I can't be with you — I can't even see you!"

"I know. It all seems wrong somehow."

"But if you should become very ill — too ill to send me any message? How could I hear from you? Tell me now so I will know."

"I can't now — I hear some one coming. Don't worry. I'll be all right." And then, in

an entirely different voice, a curt business voice: "Yes, I expect to be down to the office in a few days."

"Is some one with you now?" she asked almost in a whisper, as though afraid her voice would carry beyond him.

"Yes."

"You will try to send me some message this evening?" still in a whisper.

"Yes."

"Then I will say good-bye now; I can't bear to talk to you like this."

She hung up the receiver with an unreasoning sense of hurt. Even though she knew the necessity for the brief curtness of his replies, she could not but feel chilled. That *she* should have come into the room just then. She pictured her waiting on him, looking after his medicine and nourishment with an air of authority and ownership. In vain she tried to keep the bitterness out of her heart.

The day passed, filled with anxious thoughts. When dusk came and brought no further message, her anxiety increased. Six — seven o'clock — and still no word from him.

She hesitated to telephone again. If he had

found it impossible to even send her a note, it might not be wise for her to 'phone. It was about half past seven when at length she yielded to an impulse that had been hovering in her thoughts all day. She would drive by his house! She would get as near him as she could. Just to pass by his home might help to ease her restless anxiety.

Hurriedly she slipped into her wraps and ordered a taxi. The chauffeur stared at her unusual directions — merely to drive to West —— Street and then go very slowly through that street.

It was the theatre hour and they passed many cabs and carriages from which gleamed light gowns and jewels. She wished the driver had taken a less crowded thoroughfare; just now she shrank from this atmosphere of gaiety.

When they neared the street, she leaned forward tensely. Just one more block now! One hundred and eighty-seven was the number. With strained eyes she followed the numbers, 181 — 183 — 185 — *187!* A large grey stone house, with an air of almost stern severity. Lights glimmered behind drawn blinds only on

the first floor; the second and third story windows were dark.

At the corner she had the cabman turn and drive back slowly through the same street. As they passed the house again a light flashed suddenly in the second story, and an arm with a white frilled sleeve drew down one of the shades.

Margaret leaned back with a sudden faintness. It was not the sleeve of a maid or nurse. *It was the lace frilled sleeve of a house gown!*

"Where to now, ma'am?" It was the driver's voice. He repeated it again before she heard him. She started, and then answered dully, "Back to the hotel."

That night she spent in sleepless tossing. Only toward morning she fell asleep, and then it was to dream that she was at the gates of a wonderful garden. From within came the sound of music and happy voices, and through it all she heard his voice calling her, calling her again and again in tones of tenderest longing. The way was open, she started forward, stumbling in her eagerness, when suddenly an arm with a white frilled sleeve closed fast the high iron gates. She beat against them until her hands

were bruised and bleeding, but her cries were unanswered and she was left alone in a dreary wilderness.

At ten the next day there was still no message. Was he worse? Was he too ill to write? Filled with dread and anxiety, she stood at the window looking down at the street below, watching for a blue-coated messenger who might be bringing some word. Twice she saw one approaching, an envelope in his hand. Her heart leaped. But each time the boy passed on.

At any risk she must know how he was. She would telephone. It was a maid that answered, she spoke brokenly and her voice was hard to understand. Mr. Whitman was sick, she said, and could not come to the 'phone. And when Margaret asked if he was very ill — worse than he was yesterday — she answered that she did not know, that the doctor was with him now! To Margaret those words seemed weighted with terror.

There are times in every one's life when they are swept on to some rash act, knowing it is so, and yet being unable to control the impulse that forces them on. And so Margaret was now helpless before the reckless compelling desire to go

to him — to see him if possible, if not to learn from some one there, from some one who knew, just how ill he was. Why should she not go — a client calling on some urgent matter! No one there knew her!

Once more she slipped into her wraps and ordered a taxi. When she gave the address to the driver, there was a curious note of mingled defiance and fear in her voice.

The long ride through crowded thoroughfares, then the same street, the same house — *187!* The cab stopped. The man sprang from his seat and opened the door. For just a second Margaret shrank back. And then, with a sick beating of her heart and her limbs weak with trembling, she stepped out and went up the steps.

A trim maid opened the door. She entered the reception room and gave the girl her card.

"I should like to see Mr. Whitman."

"Mr. Whitman is ill, ma'am. I'm afraid you cannot see him."

"Will you take him the card?" There was something in her low tense voice that made the girl hesitate, then turn to do her bidding.

In spite of the tumultuous agitation of her thoughts, Margaret was keenly conscious of

every detail of the room, of the brooding silence of the house, the hushed pause that seemed over everything.

This was his home. These things he saw and touched daily. All this was a part of his life — the life he shared with another woman. These things were their common property. She had no part in it; in all this great house there was nothing she could claim. For a second she had a fierce desire to take something away with her, to assert to herself the right to it because it was his. Her eyes rested on a cabinet in the corner — it was full of small trinkets. She half moved toward it — then turned quickly away, a deep colour flooding her face.

Now came the sound of voices from the hall.

"I find him some better this morning, Mrs. Whitman. His temperature may go up again this evening, but it'll not be as high as it was yesterday."

"But, doctor, he insists on being brought down into the library. I don't think that's wise, do you?"

"Well, no; perhaps not for a day or two yet. It's just as well to keep him as quiet as you can."

He was better! He was not seriously ill!

Margaret forgot everything in the joy of that! The outer door closed after the doctor, then a tall, rather austere middle-aged woman entered the room.

"Miss Warner?" glancing at the card in her hand. "Mr. Whitman is quite ill; it would be impossible for him to see any one this morning. I am Mrs. Whitman, if there is any message you wish to leave."

"No — no — thank you," she murmured. "It is merely a matter of business — that can be postponed."

Without any clear memory of how she left the house, Margaret found herself outside. For blocks she walked on unmindful of the direction. And that was his wife — *his wife!* In those few seconds her features and expression had been burnt into her memory. The strongest impression had been that of a cold austerity. And she looked so much older than he!

An obstructed crossing finally brought her to a consciousness of her surroundings. She was in a neighbourhood of cheap flats and many children. Several blocks farther on she caught a glimpse of an elevated structure. She made her way toward it.

Would he know that she had been there? Would her card be given him? What would he think? Now the realisation of what she had done — of how it might appear to him — began to assert itself. Her face burned. Of course he would know it was her anxiety that brought her. And yet — might he not think that her pride and sense of reserve should have been stronger even than that?

When she reached the hotel, there was a note awaiting her. The clerk said it had come just a few moments after she left.

All yesterday afternoon and evening I tried to get some word to you. But it was impossible. Some one was with me every moment. I knew it must seem to you that I should have found some way. But I was afraid to arouse suspicions that might make it difficult for us in the future. I am better this morning, and am looking forward to seeing you in a few days.

If she had only waited — just a few moments more! Now, with the knowledge of his improvement, her fears and anxiety seemed groundless. Why had she done this thing? She had not only taken an unwarranted risk, but one that had in it something of indelicacy, almost of intrusion. And she had always been so proudly reticent! A torturing sense of regret and humiliation hung

over her, until about five o'clock that afternoon a messenger brought her another note.

I have just learned that you were here. *Darling*, how dear of you to come! I know now how anxious you were and it makes you seem very near and dear to me. I want to assure you that it is all right. I thought you might be worried afterward. I was simply told that a young lady called on business. Evidently it made no other impression. Had I only known when you were here, nothing could have prevented me from seeing you. I hope you will not feel hurt, dear, at the way it happened. You are so sensitive that I am afraid, after yielding to your generous impulse, you may now regret it. Don't, dear, for I love you more than ever for this proof of your love and anxiety.

Margaret pressed her cheek against the note, thrilled with a deeper realisation of his love and thoughtfulness.

. . . . . .

It was over a week before he could leave the house, and when he came to Margaret she was frightened at the worn haggardness of his face. After the first joy of their meeting, she realised that he was utterly depressed and discouraged. Anxiously she pleaded with him to tell her what was wrong.

"Oh, it's all been horrible! I don't mean the fever, if I could have shut myself up alone, I wouldn't have minded that. But she's been with

me day and night. I insisted on having a nurse, but she wouldn't hear of it. She wanted to care for me herself. She slept on a couch in my room — every time I stirred she was up. It seemed as though she was trying, by her devotion, to draw me back. For weeks I think she's felt that I've not been the same, that in some way I was drifting away from her. She doesn't suspect the real cause yet — but sooner or later she will."

"And if she should learn the truth?" breathed Margaret.

"If she should learn the truth . . . I don't know what she would do — I don't know. I'm afraid it would be something desperate. While I was sick I dreamt that they brought her home to me unconscious — dying. I saw them carrying her up the stairs. She had hurled herself in front of a train. Then I awoke to find her sitting by my bed, reading. It struck me as particularly pitiful that she had rouged her cheeks and wore her most elaborate negligee as though to lure me back with those charms. And in spite of her efforts she looked so old and worn. And all the time I knew the certain wretchedness that I was bringing her in one form or another. Oh, it's all been ghastly!"

"No — no, listen, dear! You mustn't say that — that you are bringing her certain wretchedness. You know from the beginning we both said we would make any sacrifice rather than let it ruin her life!"

"We said that then, but now I know I could not do it. That was one of the things I realised while I was sick — that whatever happened I could not give you up." He drew her toward him with a fierce tenderness. "I know now that I never can."

And for the moment she forgot all their difficulties, all the complications that surrounded them, in the joy and sweetness of his love.

Just before he left, he said hesitatingly:

"What shall we do, dear, about Sunday? You know we planned last week for a long drive this Sunday, and I've been looking forward to it all these days. But now, Mrs. Whitman is insisting that I take her to Bronxville to spend Saturday and Sunday with her sister. She says the change will do us both good. What can I do? She's worn out with waiting on me and really does need a change. I don't see how I can refuse to go, yet it seems so hard to give

up our outing. I don't think it's ever seemed quite so hard before."

"And she won't go without you?"

"That's the trouble, she won't go anywhere without me."

"Then you'll have to go with her. I understand how impossible it would be to refuse her this now. We can have our drive some other time." She tried to say it cheerfully.

But when he had gone Margaret found herself dwelling on the thought that he had not wanted Mrs. Whitman to nurse him; she need not have worn herself out. He had insisted on having a nurse, and she had not permitted it. She had wanted to strengthen her claim, her sense of possession which she felt had been slipping away.

And yet — could she blame her? Would she not do the same in her place? It was the primitive woman fighting for her mate. Many thoughts now forced themselves upon Margaret that she tried to shut out. She had not the courage to face them. She wanted to get away from them and from herself.

With a sickening sense of her own weakness, she slipped down and knelt by her chair. In her mind was a vague unformulated prayer that in

some way her love might be made *right* — that it might bring no unhappiness to this other woman. Could not such a love exist, a strong, pure love that asked only to love and be loved, without bringing misery to others?

Had fate given her this glimpse of the most beautiful thing that had ever come into her life, only that it might be renounced? Must she try to crush it out — to kill it? It would be like killing some living thing. Her brain ached with the burden of doubts and questions that pressed upon her.

V

WEAKENING

MARGARET found herself more and more drawing away from the people she knew and living only for the hours they spent together. In spite of his frequent assertion that, as he could be with her so little, he wished her to have all the diversion she could, he was intensely jealous of every other interest, however trivial, in her life.

If her telephone rang while he was there, he would become silent and morose, and once remarked bitterly that he was always being reminded of the attention showered on her by others. If he called unexpectedly and found her out, he would immediately infer that she was driving or dining with some one else.

Again and again she insisted that she would gladly give up what little social life she had. But to this he would not agree. He seemed never to realise the illogicalness of his attitude in persisting that she make no change in her social life,

and yet becoming so bitter over every incident that resulted from it.

One afternoon he chanced to call while Mr. Kenton, an editor of a magazine for which Margaret often wrote, was there. She introduced them with an easy grace, but her heart beat with misgiving. Kenton, unconscious of anything critical in the situation, carried the conversation along without effort. But Graham Whitman sat silent, his eyes dark with the rancour within him.

When Kenton had gone, Margaret stood dismayed before the fierce bitterness of his jealousy.

"Is it necessary to make a social friend of an editor? Simply because he publishes some of your work does not give him the right to call on you socially."

"He only called about those proofs. He has always been interested in my work."

"Proofs? Do you think I don't know that's a mere pretext? It's not your work he is interested in — but *you!* He's even presumed to send you flowers!"

"But that was when I was ill."

"What right has he to send you flowers at all?"

She made no reply. She felt the uselessness of any argument. He was in one of his unreasonable jealous moods when nothing she could say or do would help. He was walking nervously up and down the room. At length he came over and drew her toward him.

"Oh, I know, dear, I know I'm unreasonable, but I can't help it. It is like hot irons searing my heart when I have to stand quietly by and see other men pay you attentions, other men who are free to offer everything, while I am tied and helpless." He clenched his hands. "It's intolerable! I feel that I'm only standing in your way."

"Ah, don't say that — when you *know* . . ."

"But I've nothing to offer you! I can give you only stolen scraps of my time. I am bound hand and foot to a woman that I can't desert. If she were a younger woman, or less dependent. . . . But to desert her now, when her need for me is so great . . . you could never respect me, and I could never respect myself. That would always be between us."

"Oh, no — no, you can't leave her. You told me that in the beginning, and I said you were

right. I meant it then, and I still mean it! You must believe that I do!"

"You've been very sweet and brave about it, and very patient. But that does not alter the facts. It only makes me feel more keenly how weak I've been in accepting your generosity, in letting you give up your future for a man in my position."

A moment's silence and then he went on musingly,

"If only she were a woman to whom money would be a compensation, I would secure my freedom, sign over to her every cent I have and begin again to work for you. But she is not a mercenary woman, at least not in that sense. No amount of money would compensate for a separation from me. And lately she's been so fearfully suspicious! She watches every move I make. I'm constantly having to tell her small falsehoods. And I hate to lie!"

"But she knows nothing?" quiveringly.

"No, but she is beginning to notice a difference. I've tried very hard to be just the same to her in every way, but I find myself unconsciously trying to avoid her. The other night when I

went home she came up to kiss me. I had just been thinking of you, and instinctively I shrank from her caress. I saw her grow white. She said nothing at the time, but she watched me furtively all through dinner.

"After dinner she wanted to go to the theatre. I was tired and worried, and I'd hoped to be alone part of the evening that I might write to you. I felt I couldn't sit through one of those mawkish sentimental plays she always selects. It seemed to me that the drama I was living was too real and too terrible to witness any weak travesty on life and love.

"I tried to make some excuse, but she was hurt and displeased. I've sacrificed my own inclinations to hers for so long that now it's impossible to change my habits without arousing her keenest suspicions. If I had done as other men, belonged to three or four clubs and spent half of my evenings away from home — it wouldn't be so difficult now."

He had never talked so intimately of his life before. He was naturally a very reticent man, but now the desire to put everything before her that she might understand it all was stronger than his innate reserve.

"At college I was filled with an intense literary ambition. All my spare time I worked on a book on social ethics. But after we married I gave it all up for her, except a few articles I wrote now and then at the office. She's not a literary woman in any sense, and she was jealous of the time I put on the book. She insisted that if I was at the office all day, I should devote my evenings to her.

"It makes me heart-sick when I think of all those wasted years. I realise now that she has sapped the strength of my ambitions and dwarfed my whole mental life. It is not entirely her fault — I should have asserted my right to a certain amount of independent and individual life. But I began by yielding; I followed the line of least resistance. And then, too, I had the theory that if in this marriage I could not be happy myself, it was at least something to feel that I was making her happy. And I think her greatest happiness is in her sense of absolute ownership of me, in the satisfaction she derives from her feeling of possession."

He had ceased speaking; he was gazing out of the window with eyes that were full of bitter despair. Margaret longed to comfort and help

him, but she could think of nothing to say. She felt keenly her helplessness.

That he was growing to chafe more and more under the tyranny of his home life, she knew, and she was afraid of the gradual change in her own feeling. The sense of pity and sympathy she had at first felt for his wife was changing to one of resentment and antagonism. She realised the danger of that. She must not encourage this attitude either in herself or in him. She still shrank from the thought of building their happiness on another woman's misery. So now she only slipped her hand into his in silent sympathy. He covered it with both his own.

"How selfish I am to inflict all this on you. You've enough to bear without being burdened with my part of it. Poor little girl — and you bear it so patiently. And I've tried to keep you cooped up here away from every one, on account of my morbid jealousy. But from now on I want you to have all the social pleasure and diversion you can, I don't think I'll hurt you about it again."

She smiled a little sadly. She had come to realise this weakness of his love. She knew that whatever he might feel now, to-morrow or the

next day he would be as blindly and unreasonably jealous as ever. In everything else he was absolutely fair-minded and just, but in this one thing his mind seemed perverted, he distorted and exaggerated and misconstrued the most trivial incident.

But in spite of all their difficulties and misunderstandings they had many hours of uninterrupted happiness, when they both felt that life was giving them of its best. Hours of tenderness and love and happy wanderings, when they seemed very near each other and strong enough in their love to triumph over any obstacles that might arise.

VI

KATHERINE

ONE evening as Margaret was going down to a lonely dinner at the hotel, he telephoned to ask if she would go to dinner with him. She assented joyfully; it was so rarely that he could take her to dinner. He said he would come for her at once — in half an hour.

She put on her things with eager happiness. How did it happen, she wondered, that he could be with her this evening. The few dinners they had had together had always been planned in advance, so that he might make the excuse of an out-of-town client. Very often he would 'phone her and they would have unexpected luncheons or trips in the afternoon, but never before had they had dinner in this way.

She was all ready when he came. Their moments together were so precious that she never wasted any of them by keeping him waiting.

He held her hands tenderly. "You are won-

derful to-night. You seem bubbling over with happiness."

"I know," she laughed. "It's so lovely to be with you like this. How did it happen?"

"I'll tell you about that at dinner. Where shall we go?"

"Does it matter much where we go as long as we're together?"

He smiled down at her. "No, I don't think it does."

They decided on a quiet up-town place, where the music was unobtrusive and the service excellent. On the way there, she asked him again how he happened to be free, and again he put the question aside.

"I'll tell you after dinner. We're going to make it a happy dinner, are we not?"

She understood. He wanted to think of nothing now, but just their being together. Other things might lead to the feeling of depression and discouragement that so often came over him.

And it *was* a happy dinner. They both entered into the spirit of it with a joyous abandonment. She had never seen him more boyish, more responsive. It was as though he were trying to throw off all feeling of gloom, to wrest

from the present hour all the happiness that it held.

It was not until the dinner was almost over that he brought up the subject himself.

"I came because I could not help it.— Because I felt I would say or do something desperate if I had to sit through dinner to-night listening to a conversation about millinery and curtains. I had about all of it I could stand this afternoon."

Margaret looked her astonishment.

"For over a week Mrs. Whitman has been asking me to go with her to help select a hat."

"A hat?" incredulously.

"That's been part of my bondage," bitterly. "For years she's not bought a hat unless I've been with her. I've never been able to see where I was of the least assistance. After trying on every hat in the shop, she finally hesitates between two. And then, in order to get away quicker, I advise her to take both. It's been the same every Spring and Fall for years. Every day for a week now she has been asking me to go. So when she telephoned down to the office this afternoon, I thought I might as well go and have it over.

"While we were out, she insisted on getting some dining room curtains. I demurred at the curtains, said I was sure she could select them better alone. Then I remembered a hall rug she bought last week, after urging me to go with her. She's been complaining about it ever since. Say's it's too large, not the right colouring — that if I'd gone with her she'd never have bought it.

"So I thought it might be easier to go with her for the curtains. The strangest thing about it is that I know nothing of these things, I never make a suggestion — she does it all. Yet she always seems satisfied with what she gets if I'm with her, and dissatisfied with them if I'm not."

He paused, his eyes fixed broodingly on the wine glass he was moving back and forth by his plate.

"Naturally, I've always disliked it, but I never felt quite the repulsion that I did to-day. I took her home, then said that I'd forgotten something at the office, for her not to wait dinner, that I couldn't be back in time. I left in the midst of her protests. I had to get away, I couldn't go through a long dinner listening to her comments on the afternoon shopping, won-

dering if the hats were really worth what she paid, and if the curtains might not have been cheaper somewhere else."

"But you said she wasn't mercenary."

"She isn't — that is she's not grasping or avaricious for herself. Several times I've suggested putting certain stocks and property in her name, but she never wanted it. And often when I give her money, she'll return part of it, saying that she doesn't need it all. Yet she spends hours studying advertisements in the papers, trying to find where she can get a certain article for the least money. To buy something for a few cents less than it is worth seems to afford her the greatest satisfaction. It is the smallness — the pettiness of it all that . . ."

His voice broke.

"How contemptible it is for me to be talking of her in this way! I can't understand it, but more and more lately, I find myself wanting to tell you everything. I seem to forget all sense of loyalty to her. And for all these years it's been part of my creed that no one should know — that if I couldn't give her love I could at least give her an absolute loyalty. And now — I'm not giving even that!"

"Ah, don't — don't say that! After all, if we really love any one, it's only natural to want to talk to that one of everything that's in our heart. I don't think you should blame yourself too much."

But the moodiness and depression that she had learned to dread seemed with him again, and she tried in vain to banish it. The charm of the early part of the dinner was broken.

As they were leaving the restaurant, a slender woman in evening gown, who was dining with a man at a near-by table, rose and came swiftly toward them.

"Margaret! *Margaret Warner!*"

Margaret looked at her in bewilderment.

"Why, don't you know me — don't you *know* me?"

"Katherine Reeves?" she stammered.

It was an old school friend, the most intimate companion of Margaret's early girlhood, whom she had not seen for years, and the surprise and pleasure of this meeting was mutual.

Before they parted, Katherine insisted that she take luncheon with her to-morrow. And then added laughingly:

"You'd better plan to stay for dinner, too.

We'll hardly have time to talk over all the things we want to at a luncheon. Oh, it seems so wonderful that we should both be in New York and meet in this way!"

When they were outside, Margaret turned to him eagerly.

"Isn't she beautiful? She's grown into a perfectly beautiful woman!"

As he made no answer she repeated insistently:

"Don't you think so? Don't you think she's really very beautiful?"

"I suppose she would be considered so," he admitted reservedly.

"You don't like her? I felt that while we were talking. For some reason you're sorry we met. I know — I can tell by your voice."

"You can't expect me to be enthusiastic over a person I have seen for only a few moments. It may be a form of jealousy. You say I am jealous of every new interest that comes into your life."

"But it's more than that this time," persisted Margaret. "I feel that you do not like her."

"She wore a great many diamonds."

"Doesn't almost every one in New York?"

"Possibly, but it doesn't follow that I admire them."

"It was more than the diamonds," she persisted. "Tell me, seriously dear, what it was."

"It was only an impression, perhaps an entirely unjust one; but somehow I don't like to think of your being with her a great deal."

. . . . . .

The morning mist had turned into a cold, drizzling rain, when Margaret reached Katherine's apartment about noon the next day. It was an imposing white façaded building on Central Park west. A boy in uniform took her card, returning in a few moments to say that "Miss Reeves would see her," and led the way to the elevator.

Katherine herself opened the door, kissed her impulsively and drew her into a luxuriously furnished but much disordered bedroom. The curtains were drawn and the room was brilliant with electric lights. The air was heavy with perfume.

"Come in here — it's so much cozier than the front room. Everything's in a muss, but you won't mind that. I've kept Marie so busy this

morning manicuring and massaging me that she hasn't had time to straighten up in here."

Although it was after twelve, Katherine was still in a morning gown of pale blue silk with a great deal of lace. And Margaret realised even more than she had the night before that she had grown into a marvellously beautiful woman. And now, as she hovered around her, taking her things, arranging the pillows at her back, seeming so glad to have her there, so full of the old joyous affection — in spite of Graham's words, which still lingered in her thoughts, Margaret felt for her a strong rush of tenderness.

"There now, are you comfortable? Marie!" she called, "you might bring in some sherry. Oh, yes — you must have some. It's raw and damp out; this will do you good."

Somehow it all brought back the old school days in which Katherine had always taken care of her, waited on her, mothered her. She had had many faults, faults of quick temper, of recklessness, of exaggeration, even of untruthfulness, but she had always been unselfishly loving and loyal.

"Do you mind these lights? Would you rather I'd turn them off? I never could bear a

dark rainy day, so I shut it out and turn on all the lights."

A pretty French maid came in now with a small tray on which was a decanter and a couple of glasses. As they sipped the sherry, Katherine asked a hundred eager questions, wanting to know everything at once. How long had she been in New York, where had she lived, what had she been doing, why had they not met before?

Margaret gave only a very brief outline of the last few years, and then turned the conversation to the events in Katherine's career since they had been separated. The correspondence that had been kept up for the first few months had soon lagged and finally ceased altogether.

With all her enthusiasm, Katherine told of her trip abroad, of her two years' study of music in Berlin. Then she had gone to Paris, had sung a number of soubrette parts in the Opera Comique; then had come back to New York for a season of concert work, and now —

"Now I — I'm engaged to some one I dearly love — and — oh, Margaret, I'm very, *very* happy!" The words ended in a whirl as she impetuously threw her arms around Margaret and kissed her.

"I'm so glad, dear — you must know how glad I am," murmured Margaret. And a vague, nameless dread that had oppressed her ever since she entered the apartment was lifted. She had not tried to analyse the feeling, but there had been something in the atmosphere of the room, the luxurious furnishings, the heavy perfume, the rich, lace-covered tea gown that in some way had all impressed her with a vague unpleasantness.

The maid came in now and announced luncheon. Katherine led the way into the dining room.

"I thought you'd rather have luncheon here than go out. We can be so much more alone and we've so much to talk about."

It was a small but pleasant room. The pink shaded candles threw a soft glow over the polished mahogany table and glittering silver. A large drooping bunch of pink roses, slightly faded, stood in a crystal vase on the sideboard.

During luncheon, Katherine did not again directly refer to her engagement. The presence of the maid had a certain restraint on their conversation.

When they left the table they went through

into the front room, the drawing room of the apartment. Two large low windows overlooked the park. The furniture was gilt, Louis XV, and was richly upholstered in pale rose damask. A thick velvet carpet of the same light shade covered the floor. In one corner stood a small grand piano in white enamelled wood. Beside being over-ornate, to Margaret it all seemed entirely characterless. It reminded her of the stage setting of a modern society play.

But Katherine's attitude was so plainly expectant of some notice and admiration of the room that Margaret murmured something about it being "very attractive."

"Yes, isn't it attractive," repeated Katherine brightly, with that same childish pleasure that she had always had when anything that belonged to her was admired. "I love that shade of rose. And isn't this a beautiful view of the park?"

It *was* a beautiful view, and Margaret could say so honestly.

"Why, it's stopped raining! Wouldn't you like to take a drive? I want you to see 'Queen B.'—she is a perfect beauty."

"Do you keep a horse?"

"Oh, yes," with an unmistakable note of pride.

"Queen B. is almost famous. Her record two years ago was 2:13. Of course she isn't racing now. I — I — bought her last Fall."

A thought that had been in the back-ground of Margaret's mind was now forcing itself upon her: the income with which to meet all this very evident expense — there had been, in Katherine's outline of the past few years, nothing to account for it.

"Come in here while I dress. It isn't three yet; we'll have time for a long drive before dark."

When they were again in her bedroom, she took up a photograph in a heavy silver frame which stood on her dressing table, and handed it to Margaret.

"That's his picture — and here's another." From a jewel case she drew out a small diamond-studded locket.

It was undoubtedly the face of a very handsome man. To Margaret it suggested the typical well-groomed clubman.

"Here are some others — I've a lot of kodak pictures of him."

She was searching eagerly through a box filled with unmounted photographs.

"Here he's playing golf. And here's one taken on horseback. This is on the lawn of his summer home at Lake Wood — here's another on the veranda."

"Who's the young boy with him in this one — the one on the lawn?"

Margaret asked the question thoughtlessly, merely from a nervous desire to say something when she felt that some comment was expected. To her surprise Katherine flushed, hesitated, and then answered:

"That — that is Clyde — his son."

"Oh, I didn't know he had been married before," hastily, trying to cover the embarrassing pause.

Katherine's face was now crimson. She was staring down at one of the pictures she still held in her hand. There was a silence of several moments. Then she said with a desperate tenseness to her voice:

"He is married — *now*. I think I would rather tell you than let you find it out."

A chill weight was creeping around Margaret's heart.

"I know I said we are engaged — and we are. He's never been happy with his wife — he ex-

pects to get a divorce." Katherine was now looking at her almost appealingly.

"Does his wife care for him?" Margaret asked in a low voice, after a moment of strained silence.

"She doesn't care for anything except money — and he'll leave her plenty of that."

"But the child?"

Katherine hesitated. "Of course he doesn't expect to get the separation just now — not until the boy is older. It may not be for a year or so yet."

The telephone rang imperatively. Katherine threw down the photographs and hurried across the room. On the wall, near her bed were *two* telephones.

"Hello!" . . . "Yes," with a joyous note in her voice. "Where?" . . . "Oh, that's why you didn't call me up this morning."

Margaret rose and went into the front room, far over by the window. But even there she could not help but hear.

"You'll be back to-morrow about four?" . . . "Oh, did you?" . . . "No, it hasn't come yet. It may be down in the office; they're so slow here about sending up packages." . . . "I'm just go-

ing out. I think Queen B. needs some exercise." . . . "Yes." . . . "All right, good-bye."

She came running in now, her eyes shining and her whole face aglow.

"You needn't have come in here. He just called me up to say that he was on his way to Philadelphia, and that he'd sent me a box of confections. There's hardly a day that he doesn't send flowers or fruit."

With all her old childish irresponsibility, she seemed to have entirely put aside their conversation of a few moments before.

"Come back in here. I'll dress right away now. I believe the sun's coming out — we'll have a wonderful ride. Oh, first I'll see if that box is down stairs."

She went over to the telephone — but not the one she had used before.

"Hello! Is there a package for me down there?" . . . "Send it up at once."

"Yes, it's there — they're bringing it up. Now what *shall* I wear?"

She threw open a closet door, displaying innumerable gowns. A dozen or more high-heeled fancy slippers were thrown carelessly on the floor.

The telephone rang again — a short, uncertain ring.

"Oh, that's just the house 'phone ringing off," as she selected a light grey walking suit. "You see, I have two 'phones — one is a private wire to Mr. Walton's office. The telephone girls here are so inquisitive, it's horrid to feel that they hear everything you say. So he had that put in when I took the apartment."

The maid entered now with a square white package. "That must be the candy! You open it, Margaret, while I dress."

With a curious feeling of reluctance, Margaret took the manicure scissors she handed her and cut the string. It was a large box of bon-bons, chocolates, crystallized fruits and flowers. The box was fitted with small trays, each holding a different confection.

"Try some of those candied violets," suggested Katherine, whose hands were busy just then with her hair. "The last I had from there were delicious."

"No, not now. I don't think I care for any just now." She placed the box on a chair and pushed it away from her. At that moment she felt that any of it would have choked her.

Katherine turned from the mirror in amazement. "You don't care for candy? You're not going to have any?"

"Not now. I — I'm afraid I'm getting a headache. I'll go in here by the window while you dress."

She wanted to be alone for a few moments — to get away from the perfumed boudoir with its luxurious fittings, from the warm vivid beauty of Katherine's bare arms and neck, from the intimate glimpses of expensive French lingerie. Her brain was dizzy with vague thoughts and doubts. The indefinable impressions that had come to her when first she entered the apartment were now taking form, strengthened by each succeeding incident. Every act of Katherine's added to the doubts.

Half an hour later they entered the office of a large boarding stable. Katherine explained that she never telephoned for the horse to be brought around, because Queen B. was too nervous to stand. The stable was only a few blocks from her apartment, and she usually walked around for her.

As they entered the office, a sporty-looking man with his hat on the back of his head and a

cigar in his mouth, both of which he failed to remove, came toward them.

"Queen B.," said Katherine briefly.

The man went to the door. "Bring out Mr. Walton's mare!" he yelled.

Katherine flushed crimson, but she made no comment. And Margaret was glad for her silence. It seemed to her then that any explanation or excuse would only have made the situation more painful.

VII

GROWING UNREST

BEFORE he spoke, Margaret knew that something had happened. He dropped his hat and gloves on a table and stood for several moments silently turning over some magazines. At length, without looking up, he said slowly,

"She knows. She heard me telephone you last night."

Margaret caught her breath, clasping tight the back of a chair. She made no attempt to question him. After a little he went on in the same tense, suppressed voice.

"She's been growing more and more suspicious. For days I've felt that she's been watching every move I made. Last night she came down into the hall — and heard me 'phone to you."

"Heard you?"

He smiled bitterly. "Yes, it seems she was listening at the library door. The door was

closed and I thought she was up in her room, but she came down stairs — and *listened.*"

"How — how much did she hear?"

"About all that I said."

"And then?"

"Then she burst into the library and admitted that she had heard it all. That she listened because she felt she had a *right* to listen. Oh, I can't tell you the rest — there was a pitiable scene. I never knew before that she was a hysterical woman."

"What did you say? What did you do?"

"I tried to soothe her. There was nothing else I could do. I tried to make her think she was mistaken, that she'd misunderstood much of what I'd said, that it had not the meaning she thought. Then she forced me to promise that I would never see you again."

"And you promised?"

"I had no choice. Of course I knew I couldn't keep the promise when I made it. But she was desperate. I had to pacify her in every way I could."

There was a moment's silence, and then he added fiercely:

"I hate to lie! And I'm being constantly forced into it now."

Margaret gazed up at him in wretched silence. She knew how he shrank from untruths, and deceptions of every kind, and yet it was because of her that they were continually forced upon him.

He threw down the magazine now and began walking up and down the room as he often did in tense moments.

"Last night shattered a hope that I've been almost unconsciously cherishing for days. I hadn't yet mentioned it to you, but lately I've been hoping that after all it might be possible for me some time to tell her the truth — relying on her generosity to free me. But I know now I could never tell her. She could not bear it. Her sense of control, of absolute ownership of me, is too strong. She could never give it up."

He came over beside her and drew her gently toward him.

"And now I'm afraid I can't see you as often as I have — at least not for a time. She's so fearfully suspicious just now. It's for your sake too, dear. I want to shield you all I can.

As yet she doesn't know your name — and she must never know it."

"But that time I called — when you were sick! The maid gave her my card?"

"I know; I thought of that, but it seems she's forgotten it or doesn't connect it with this."

"But you don't mean — you don't think she would come here — or do anything like that?"

"I don't know. I don't know now what she might not do. I didn't think she would listen at a door. But she did that. I suppose a jealous woman will do anything."

"But she's not a vindictive woman?"

"She never has been."

There was a long pause, then Margaret asked hesitatingly,

"And now — we will have to give up our drive and dinner Saturday?"

"I'm afraid so. She's insisting that I take her to Garden City — for a week or ten days."

"A week or ten days! And — you — are *going?*"

"I don't see how I can avoid it. We always go every Spring about this time, but this year I've been putting it off from week to week. Now she insists on going Saturday. If I refuse, it

will only confirm her suspicions. But I shall not stay ten days, dear, not even a week. To pacify her I'll go for a few days and then find some excuse to come back — some business appointment."

The realisation that they could talk so calmly about this, came to Margaret with a sudden chill. A few months ago they had spoken only in awed whispers of the possibility of his wife ever "knowing." Now that she *did* know, they discussed it almost as a matter-of-course. Were they growing hardened and callous to it all?

She did not express this thought to him, she was learning to keep many of her doubts and fears to herself — lest they depress him more.

When he was leaving he saw the tears in her eyes. He came back and took both her hands in his.

"Do you want me to stay, dear? Shall I risk it and refuse to go? I will if you feel that I should."

"Oh, no — *no!* It will only make things more difficult if you don't go. After all, it's only for a few days. I'm afraid we're both getting very weak if we can't bear such a short separation."

"I know," he answered despairingly. "It

seems that I haven't the strength or courage that I used to have. I just want *you,* dear — I want you with me all the time, and I don't seem to have the heart to struggle with conditions that keep us separated."

He was to leave at four o'clock the next day. He had wanted to come up at one and take her to luncheon, yet she instinctively felt that the luncheon would not be a happy one. They would both be depressed and it would only make it more difficult for him to go. In many ways she felt it would be better not to see him again before he left. So she told him to call her up at half past three and say good-bye over the 'phone just before he started.

But the next morning she was restless and unhappy. After all, why had she not let him take her to luncheon? It could make her no more unhappy than she already was. She wanted to see him. Just to see and talk to him for a few moments would be something.

The desire to telephone him to come for her was very strong, but she did not yield to it. Instead she determined to go out, to do some shopping, anything to get away from herself and her thoughts until it was too late for luncheon.

She would stay out until three o'clock — until just time to receive his good-bye message.

She took the subway to one of the big shops and wandered around aimlessly. What was it that she wanted? The toilet counter was before her and she remembered she needed some dentifrice.

All the clerks were busy. While she waited, she glanced listlessly over the lavish display of dainty bottles and boxes, the innumerable preparations for toilet and bath. The air was heavy with the mingled odours of soaps and perfumes. In front of her a clerk was deftly adding up a list of items on her sales book.

"Four dollars and sixty-nine cents. You wish these charged?"

"Yes, they're to be charged and sent special. I want them by three o'clock. You have the right address? — Mrs. Graham Whitman, 187 West —— Street. You'll not fail to send them special?"

She was standing so close beside Margaret that her dress brushed against her as she passed.

For a moment Margaret stood motionless, then turned blindly and left the shop. A fierce, sickening jealousy clutched at her throat. "Mrs.

Graham Whitman" . . . That was her name, she was his wife, she had a *right* to that name! And she was buying these things to take on this trip with him — with *him!* Margaret lashed herself with the torturing thoughts of all the intimacy and close companionship of travelling, of life at a resort hotel where he would be with her constantly.

"Mrs. Graham Whitman" . . . It was only her imagination, of course, and yet it seemed as if there had been a note of triumph, of the exultancy of possession, as she gave the name. "Mrs. Graham Whitman" . . . Oh, it rang with such intimacy!

When she reached her apartment it was just two o'clock. Without stopping to consider the wisdom of her impulse, she yielded to the uncontrollable desire to telephone him, to ask him to come to her before he left.

He came at once, solicitous, anxious, loving, for even over the 'phone he had detected a sob in her voice. She threw herself into his arms with an incoherent account of the incident.

"And she gave your name — *your* name — Mrs. Graham Whitman! If she had only said Mrs. Mary Whitman, or even Mrs. G. K. Whit-

man, but Mrs. *Graham* Whitman! Oh, she said it as though she was a *part* of you! And she had the things charged — the bill will go to you. Oh, don't misunderstand me — you know I don't mean . . ."

"I know what you mean, dear. And lately I've had the same feeling. I've wanted to put half of my property in her name so she would have her own income. But she's fought against it. She's always said she loved to feel that I was paying for all her personal needs, that she never wanted an income of her own, that it was *my* money she wanted to feel that she was spending — not hers. She's always been like that — always used every incident, every detail of life, to make our relationship seem more intimate and binding."

"Oh, I'm so sorry it happened," she faltered. "I'm so sorry I met her. It's only increased a feeling that's been growing upon me lately. The sympathy and consideration I used to have for her has all gone, and now — now . . ."

"I know, dear," he mused sadly, "I know."

VIII

A FALSE POSITION

"AND you'll be gone a week?"

"I'm afraid it will take a full week."

"It seems hard that you must go now. You've had to be away so much lately, and I feel so lost — so desolate when you're gone. Even when I can't see you often, just to know that you're in the city seems to help. I never feel quite so unhappy when I know you're here."

"I would postpone this if I could, Margaret. But it's that Carrington case I told you about. If I'd known it in time, I'd have tried to arrange for us to dine together this evening."

"And we can't?"

"I'm afraid not. The first of the week I asked Mr. Barton to dine with me. He's one of the other attorneys on the case. I had intended to have him at the house, but two of the servants are sick and Mrs. Whitman has asked me to take him to a hotel. But somehow I resent the

thought of dining out with any one but you to-night."

"And she — will be with you?" jealously.

"No; her sister is in town to-day."

Margaret's face lit up suddenly; with an eager exclamation she caught his arm.

"Then — then — why —"

"What, dear?" as she hesitated.

"No — no, I think of such wild things. Of course it would be impossible."

"What would? What are you thinking of?"

"Nothing. I see now it wouldn't do. But just for the moment it flashed over me that I might go to the same place for dinner, and you could come over to my table and be with me for a few minutes. You could tell Mr. Barton that I was a former client whom you hadn't seen for some time."

"Would you do that, Margaret?" there was an eager note in his voice.

"What restaurant are you going to?"

"It makes no difference — anywhere that you suggest."

"If I should go, I'd rather it would be the Hotel —— where I stopped when I first came to the city. I wouldn't mind dining there alone."

"It shall be the Hotel ——! That's an excellent place to dine. And just to know you're there — to look up now and then and see you across the room, will be a great deal." He smiled tenderly. "You're the dearest and most resourceful little woman in the world."

She flushed. "Sometimes I'm afraid you'll think me too resourceful. It seems to me I'm always so full of plans and schemes. I suppose it's part of my story-writing instinct."

He was silent.

"You do think that — you do feel that I'm too — resourceful?" with the hope that he would deny it.

"Not quite that. I hardly know how to express it. I think it's partly that a man likes to feel a woman's dependence upon him. But I always know that you could out-wit and out-plan me in any emergency. Another thing I always feel so helpless before is your acting. Sometimes I feel —" He stopped with a sense of his inability to make words convey what he wished.

Margaret tried in vain to keep down the quick resentment which she knew was wholly unreasonable. The colour flamed in her cheeks.

"Don't, dear, don't feel hurt. I shouldn't have said that."

"If that is what you feel, you might as well say it," she interrupted coldly.

There was a silence of several moments, then with one of her quick, generous impulses she slipped her hand into his.

"You are right. I know there are times when I *do* act. I can't help it. It seems part of my nature. But you can always feel sure of the sincerity of my love for you. You do feel that —don't you?"

"You know I do," he answered gently.

It was just seven when Margaret stepped from a cab in front of the Hotel ——. In the intervening two hours, after he had gone, she had alternately decided to come and not to come. But her desire to see and be near him again before he left the city, and a certain spirit of adventure (of which she was entirely conscious) overruled the reluctance and timidity she could not help but feel.

As she passed through the brilliantly-lighted halls to the dining room, her heart beat fast and the colour rushed to her face. He had said they

would be on the right hand side near the wall. At the entrance she gave one swift glance along the tables to the right. It seemed that almost instantly her eyes met his, and then, in nervous confusion, before he had time to show any sign of recognition, she hastily averted her gaze.

The head waiter came up and led her toward the other side of the room. She followed him only part of the way, then motioned her preference to a table from which there was an unobstructed view of where they were sitting.

She picked up the menu and kept her head bowed over it. She was intently conscious that he was waiting for her to look up that he might make some formal sign of greeting. At length, with a still deepening colour, she met his eyes again and returned his bow and smile.

Still painfully self-conscious and confused, even after she had given her order, she kept her gaze fixed on the menu. Would he come over now, or wait until they were leaving?

It was not until the oysters were served that she had the courage to glance toward him again. This time he did not see her; he was talking to Mr. Barton. Then she discovered that the mirror which lined the wall beside her reflected per-

fectly the table at which he sat. She could watch his every movement unobserved! Now he was leaning his arm on the table with a characteristic grace she so loved; now he was smiling slightly in response to some remark by Mr. Barton. With a thrill of pride she realised how distinguished he looked, how from the very strength of his personality he seemed to stand out from the men about him.

When a little later she saw him coming toward her, her heart bounded to her throat. He held out his hand with a few formal words, then he leaned nearer and said in a low voice,

"It makes me wretched to see you over here alone. Let me bring Mr. Barton over and have the rest of our dinner served here. It'll be all right. I can easily say you are a client — it will seem quite natural."

"No — no, I won't know what to say! I shall feel so awkward and self-conscious."

"You only feel that now. You'll be perfectly at ease when we're over here — I'm sure you will!"

He was leaving, in spite of her protests; then he turned back and murmured smilingly:

"Only you mustn't forget and call me 'dear.'"

Her eyes smiled back at him. "I think I can remember — if you can."

In a few moments he was introducing Mr. Barton to her. The slight flurry of the waiter in arranging a third seat at her small two-seated table helped to break any awkwardness of the first few moments. Then she was surprised to find that she was not as self-conscious as she had been alone. She felt a sudden sureness of herself. Just to feel him beside her, had given her confidence. The conversation flowed easily along conventional channels.

It was not until the end of the dinner, when the coffee and liqueurs were served, that Mr. Barton suddenly raised his glass with the remark,

"We must drink to the absent one — Mrs. Whitman."

It was so unexpected, so wholly unforeseen . . .

Margaret felt her glass touch her lips. What would he say? What could he say? The silence was too long . . . Mr. Barton would notice . . . And then he said quietly,

"That was a very thoughtful toast."

"It would have completed the table to have had Mrs. Whitman with us this evening," Mr. Barton added courteously.

"Mrs. Whitman's mother is in town and they usually prefer to dine at home," in the same quiet voice.

And then the conversation drifted on again. Margaret realised that he was controlling it now, keeping it in easy channels, making it necessary for her to reply only in monosyllables. He felt the wretchedness of the incident and was doing what he could to help her. But he could not take away the sense of poignant humiliation. She had never heard "Mrs. Whitman" referred to by any one else. It seemed to force upon her a stinging realisation of her position.

She was passionately glad when the dinner was over. Just to get away — to be alone! When he put her into the cab he said miserably,

"It was all my fault. I shouldn't have brought him over. I see that now. It was a false, strained position to place you in. I might have known that something like that would happen."

"No — no," she murmured, "it was my fault too — I shouldn't have come — I shouldn't have suggested it."

"If I could only go home with you, I could keep away thoughts that I know you will have

alone. But don't, dear; try not to think of it. Try not to think of anything but that I love you very dearly, and that nothing like this will ever occur again — I will shield you too carefully."

But there were many things she could not help but think of, and her face burned against her pillow until far into the night.

IX

COMPLICATIONS

"I DIDN'T know you had a new secretary."

"A new secretary? Why, I haven't. What made you think that?"

"This afternoon I telephoned to your office and a woman answered. She said you were out but that she was your secretary, and would I not leave my name and message."

"What time was that?"

"About three o'clock."

"Did you leave any message?"

"No, I just said for you to call up Miss Warner when you came in."

"Did she ask for your 'phone number?"

"Yes."

"And you gave it?" tensely.

"Yes; I said you knew it, but she insisted so I repeated it. Why, dear, what's the matter? What makes you look like that?"

"That was — Mrs. Whitman."

"Oh, no — no! It *couldn't* have been."

"She was there between three and four. I came in a little after four and Matthews said she'd just gone."

"And I gave her my name and number!" brokenly.

"You've only hastened things by perhaps a few days. For weeks she's been determined to find out who you are. I knew she'd succeed sooner or later — it had to come."

"But how could she claim to be your secretary when Mr. Matthews was there?"

"It seems that she sent Matthews out on some trivial errand. When I learned that, I felt she had done it purposely, that she had come down with the intention of going through my desk. She knew I would be at a committee meeting this afternoon."

"Would she do that? Would she go through your private papers?"

"She would never have done it before. But I think now in her desperate jealousy she would do almost anything. But your letters are safe. While I keep them in my desk, they are in a drawer for which I had a special lock made. That you should 'phone while she was there and

Matthews out was, of course, an accident of which she was quick to take advantage. And now that she knows your telephone number she can easily get the address from Central."

"But will that prove anything? You have many women clients."

"Yes, but she has only to come here and enquire of the clerk to learn that I've been calling here for months. If she can't get the information from him, it wouldn't be difficult to bribe the bell boys. There're a dozen ways she can find out now."

"Would she come here and *bribe the bell boys?*"

He flushed slightly at the note of scorn in her voice.

"Perhaps not herself. But there are detective agencies all over the city that do just that kind of work."

"A detective? And you think . . ."

For several moments he stood moodily studying a design in the rug. Then he said slowly,

"We must do everything we can to avoid a crisis. I'm in no position either to tell her the truth or leave her now. If I had done it six months ago, it would not have been quite so

horrible — but now — now . . ." He turned quickly and walked toward the window.

Margaret rose and went over beside him.

"What is it, dear? You're keeping something from me — I have felt it for weeks. Tell me what it is. Tell me, dear, and let me help you."

"No, you have enough to bear. You can do nothing, and it will only make it harder for you."

"Tell me — you *must* tell me! You make me feel that you're shutting me out of your life, of the little part of your life that I *can* share."

"Not this — I can't tell you this. I must fight it out alone."

"Don't you trust me? Don't you trust me, Graham?" She was sobbing now. "I can bear anything but the feeling that you don't trust me — that you are drawing away from me."

"You know it's not that. I had only hoped to spare you pain and worry — but if you put it that way, I will tell you, of course."

He hesitated and then said slowly,

"Whatever happens I could not leave her now, for she would be penniless. In the last six months I have lost about fifty thousand dollars — practically everything I have."

In an instant she was clinging to him, murmur-

ing words of tenderest love and comfort, covering his eyes and forehead with kisses. All the mother love, that is a part of every woman, was aroused in her now. He was in trouble — in sore distress. He needed her love and sympathy as he had never needed it before, and she gave it to him without reservation. The shyness she usually felt in any voluntary caress was not with her now. She was conscious only of a great yearning to help him, to make him forget all worry and trouble in the tenderness of her love.

"I shall never forget, Margaret, that your first instinct was to comfort me, not to question or blame, but just to comfort. Do you know you haven't yet asked me how it happened?"

"I don't think I thought of that."

"I lost it in stocks — in speculating — something I haven't done for years. I felt that if we should ever begin life together, I would not want it to be on the money I had earned while I was with her. That if ever I left her, I should want to give her everything I had made during the years we'd been married.

"And for our possible future together I opened an entirely new account at the Metropoli-

tan Bank, hoping to build it up by extra work outside my regular practice. But I grew impatient. I wanted to increase it more rapidly, so I made several ventures in stocks. That was just before the panic in September. When that came on I lost heavily. To retrench my losses I went in still deeper. I was desperate. I felt that in one sense it was her money I had lost, and I must make it back. Then I lost again and still again. Oh, I can't talk about it —"

"Listen, dear. I have some money, not very much — but a few thousands. Let me —"

He put her from him roughly. "Do you think I would touch your money?"

"But I want to help you. It would make me happier than anything else in the world."

"You can help me, but not in that way. You can help by being patient and cheerful. I won't be able to be with you as often as I have been — we will have to give up a great deal. For I must work — I *must* give more time to my work now than I've ever given before. There is no way to get back this money but through my practice."

"And she does not know of — this loss?"

"No, and I must keep it from her. She would worry herself ill if she knew."

It came to Margaret with a sickening sense of oppression that she had been the cause of all this. Had it not been for her, for his hope of their future together, he would not have felt the need of making these investments, and would not now be facing these difficulties.

The loss of his entire fortune, the work of many years — aside from his anxiety about his wife — what would it mean to him? What effect would it have on his life? Even though he did not now, might he not some day blame her for the part, however innocent, she had had in it all?

The long silence that had fallen upon them was broken by a clock striking the half hour.

"Half past six! I must go, dear. I mustn't be late for dinner to-night. It would only make matters worse."

After he had gone, she sat by the window brooding over the hoplessness of it all. How would it end? Could they ever extricate themselves from the obstacles that were thickening around them?

What would be the result of the loss of this money? She had a heart-sick presentiment that it would mean a great deal, that while he was

in no way a mercenary man, the loss of his fortune would tend to humiliate him, to decrease his self-confidence and assurance.

. . . . . .

The next morning she received this note:

Had a serious time when I reached home last night. She had already found out your address and knew that I had been calling there constantly. Threatened to kill herself if I ever saw you again. This morning she is still hysterical. I must do what I can to pacify her. It will be impossible for me to see you for several days. Try to be brave and patient; that will help me more than anything else — and I need help now.

After the first shock and distress of the letter, a glow of love and self-sacrifice swept over her. She *would* be brave and patient. She would make no demands on him now.

She answered the note at once, saying that all her love and sympathy went out to him, that she knew he had much to contend with now, and for him not to be worried or distressed about her in any way. Even if she could not see him for several days she would try to be content and cheerful. And if it was difficult for him to send her messages, she would not misunderstand his silence. She would do all she could to help him in this way, as she knew of no other; and above everything else she wanted to help him.

No further message came that day. The next morning there was still no word. He might at least have telephoned! She tried in vain to crush down the sense of hurt and neglect. It was not until three days later that he telephoned. He was at once conscious of the coldness and formality in her voice.

"You wrote me you would not misunderstand my silence."

"What makes you think I have?"

"Your voice. You are hurt and indignant because I took you at your word."

"Not at all," still coldly.

"Margaret, do you think you are being fair? You promised to help me — to try to be brave and cheerful. I am surrounded with all kinds of difficulties, and now you're going to make things harder by making me feel that I've offended you. Shall I risk everything and come to see you this afternoon?"

"Oh, no — no, not if it will make things more difficult."

"It will. But rather than have you feel hurt and neglected — I will come."

"No, I don't want you to do that. I know you should not take any risks now. And since

you've telephoned, I will be more content. It was only because I didn't hear from you at all that I felt hurt." There was a tremulous note in her voice now.

"Poor little girl! It's been hard, I know. It would help us both, I think, if I could see you for a few moments. It would be perfectly safe if we could meet somewhere — just so I do not come to your hotel. Would you feel hurt if I should ask you to do that — to meet me somewhere for a few moments?"

"Why should I feel hurt?"

"You're so sensitive — I'm always afraid of hurting you. I thought you might feel humiliated if I asked you to meet me at a subway station."

"I will meet you anywhere — I think you ought to know that."

"Will you?" she felt the glad note in his voice. "Will you come at once — say in about three quarters of an hour — to the Grand Central subway? I'll be waiting for you there — the down-town side."

She hung up the receiver. In three-quarters of an hour — she was to see him in three-quarters of an hour! She slipped into a street suit with

eager happiness. The slight aversion she had always had for the subway was now changed to a warm liking and gratitude as it whirled her toward him.

At the Grand Central he was there on the platform, waiting to help her off. For a second he held both her hands.

"It was good of you to come, Margaret."

"And you thought I would feel humiliated to meet you in this way?"

"I didn't know. You are sensitive about so many things."

"But I'd do anything to see you. Oh, I've *wanted* to see you so!" Her lips trembled.

"Margaret! My poor darling," he murmured as he bent toward her.

"What has happened — tell me! Oh, I've been so worried."

"I can't talk about it — don't ask me, Margaret. It has all been so wretched."

"Oh, you must tell me — you must! It will worry me sick if you don't — I've been imagining all kinds of dreadful things."

It was several moments before he spoke, and then she felt it was with an effort.

"It seems that day she was down at the office

she found out more than I thought. The drawer in which I keep your letters, the one with the special lock, she of course could not open. But in the drawer underneath she found a letter that in some way had slipped down from the locked drawer. I suppose in opening and closing the drawer this letter got caught in the back and fell through."

"One of my letters?" breathlessly.

"No. The strange part of it is that it was one of mine!"

"One of yours?"

"Yes, an unfinished one. I remember one day while I was writing you, some one came in, and I locked the letter in the drawer with yours. It was that unfinished note that fell through into the drawer below."

"What was it? What had you written?"

"It was one of the most unfortunate things she could have found. It was written the time you were so ill, and was full of anxiety and solicitude about your health, and regret that I couldn't be with you constantly. There was no name or address, so I tried to make her believe that it was merely a letter I copied, a letter given me by a client as part of the testimony in a divorce case.

She knows I never handle cases of that kind, but for the sake of her pride she is trying to make a pretence at believing it."

"Oh, I'm so sorry it happened! But why did she do that — why did she go through your desk? Doesn't she feel that it was a most contempt — that it was not an honourable thing to do?"

"Yes, she feels that keenly. She says she knows it was a contemptible thing; her only justification is the same as when she listened at the 'phone — that I drove her to it, that she felt she must know the truth. And that same afternoon she found your address and learned how often I'd been calling there. She even knew I was there that very afternoon."

"How *could* she know that?"

"She wouldn't give me the particulars. But I suppose having your 'phone number she got the address from Information and then sent a detective to the hotel. I may even have been there when he came."

"Oh, how dreadful! It cheapens it all so. It makes me feel — Oh, it's all so humiliating!"

"I know — I feel that too. Yesterday it seemed almost unbearable. That is one reason I did not want to tell you. But you see now

how imperative it is that I do not come to the hotel. It is best not even to write or telephone you there unless it's absolutely necessary. It's for your sake, dear — to shield you. It almost maddens me when I think how little protection I can give you — and it must be only negative. I can shield you only by remaining away from you."

"Do you mean that I'm not to see you or hear from you at all?" despairingly.

"Only for a few days. I know that neither of us could stand that long, but just until I have time to arrange things. I thought of getting a lock post-office box for each of us; in that way our mail at least would be safe."

"It isn't safe now?"

"I don't know. It may be, but for your sake I don't want to take any risks."

An express train thundered by, almost drowning his voice.

"I mustn't keep you standing here. Come up and let me get a taxi to take you home. I don't like to think of your going back alone on the subway; it'll be crowded now."

As he led her up the steps and across the street

toward a line of cabs, she was filled with a sick disappointment. She had thought he would take her to some restaurant — a café — some place where they could be together for a little while. Was she only to see him for these few moments? She wanted to speak of it, to make some suggestion, but her pride kept her silent. Perhaps he had read something of her thoughts, for as he put her in a cab he said longingly,

"If I could only keep you with me for a while longer — but I promised to be home at five."

There was a conscious pause, and then he asked hesitatingly,

"Margaret, would you come here again at the same time day after to-morrow? You know how I hate to ask this of you, but it's the only way I can safely see you now."

"I'll come gladly, dear. I haven't the feeling about it that you seem to think. I would have, of course, under any other circumstances. But since I know it's impossible now for you to come to me, there's nothing I wouldn't do to be with you — if only for a few moments."

"Margaret!" His lingering hand clasp was like a caress.

As the taxi moved off and left him standing there, her heart went out to him in a rush of love, and of infinite pity for all the difficulties that, because of her, were now surrounding him.

X

DESPONDENCY

THE next few weeks were filled with clandestine meetings, meetings at subway and elevated stations, at banks and drug stores, stolen moments of evasion and subterfuge that hurt them both, that put a sense of degradation upon their love that had never been there before.

She could no longer protest that she did not feel the humiliation of it all. She felt it keenly, but always the longing to see him was stronger than everything else.

She watched with dread his growing moodiness and depression. Their old hours of happiness and light-heartedness were entirely gone. They were weighted down now by conditions that seemed daily to grow more unbearable.

Margaret's own suffering had hardened her to the sufferings of his wife. Since the incident of the telephone she realised how radically her feelings had changed. Where before she had felt

both sympathy and consideration, she now felt only bitter antagonism. And more and more frequently this bitterness and jealousy found expression in words.

It seemed to her that the depths of misery and abasement had been reached when one day she recklessly taunted him with lack of courage — of the courage of his love — saying that if he really loved her he would have long ago given up everything for her and saved them both all this anguish. And he answered that love should not mean cruelty and wreckage, that even for her he could not forget entirely what he owed that poor woman who was his wife. He had wronged her enough.

It was the first time she had expressed in any way the wish that he would leave his wife. Immediately she tried to recall the words, saying that she did not mean that, that she was nervous and overwrought.

"I know," he said sadly. "I don't blame you. If you've grown bitter and resentful toward her, it is my fault. For months I've talked of her, have told you all her faults and weaknesses. I'm thoroughly ashamed of all that I've said. We've

come to think of her as our enemy. That is fatal; we mustn't encourage that feeling."

But unconsciously, or because they could not help it, the feeling was encouraged. His resolve never again to speak of his wife in any way that would increase their hostility toward her was broken only a few days later, when they met for one of their stolen half hours. Margaret had come to know at a glance when anything had happened; but she had also learned never to try to force his confidence.

At first he talked only of generalities, trying to keep from a subject that he knew was dangerous for them both. But at length he broke out in uncontrolled bitterness.

"I can't stand this much longer. All day yesterday I was hounded — literally *hounded.* And I suppose when I go home this evening it will be the same thing."

She was silent. She had found that when he was in these moods any comments or questions had only a tendency to make him draw back within himself. They seemed to bring him to a consciousness of what he was saying, and had the effect of checking any confidences of this kind.

"Yesterday she wanted me to take her to Bronxville to her sister's. I shrank from a Sunday of family gossip just now, so I made some excuse. Then she wanted to go to Garden City or to half a dozen other places she suggested. Since I couldn't be with you, I wanted a quiet day alone in my study. But she insisted that I should take her somewhere. Finally I told her I didn't want to go out. Then she accused me of never wanting to take her anywhere, that she knew I was planning to see you, and that she didn't intend to tolerate it much longer. I didn't answer her — I went into the library and closed the door.

"For the rest of the day she watched every move I made. When I went to the corner to get some cigars, I saw her at one of the upper windows leaning far out to see which way I went. And when I came back she accused me of having sent some message to you.

"Then, while we were at luncheon, the telephone rang. Susan said it was some one to speak to me. It was only a client who had returned to town and wanted to make an appointment for to-day. I was at the 'phone such a few seconds, that she didn't have time to get away, for when I

came out I found her listening at the door. She had followed me up stairs from the dining room — thinking it was you who'd telephoned. That makes the second time she's done that.

"I didn't say a word, but she must have seen the contempt in my face. She burst into tears and said what she said before — that this was what I had driven her to, that I knew she'd never done such things, but now she couldn't help it. Oh, it sickened me — the whole thing sickened me."

"But you don't feel that you are to blame? You don't think she was justified in —" faltered Margaret.

"That's the worst of it — I *do* feel that. She is right; I have driven her to this. It seems pitiable that our love should bring humiliation and loss of self-respect to three people."

"Ah, don't say that!"

"It's true. Don't you think I know how all these weeks of clandestine meetings have hurt you? And I'm being daily forced into lies and petty deceptions of all kinds."

"Then you mean — you mean that our love is wrong?"

He hesitated a moment, then answered:

"I don't know. I only know that so far it has brought only suffering to us all."

"And you can say that when you have the memory of all our wonderful hours together — golden hours! The most wonderful happiness either of us have ever known!"

He was silent.

The sense of a great dread and foreboding filled Margaret's heart. Was this the beginning of the end? Would all these difficulties and humiliations at last make him revolt at the love that had caused them? She thought of his financial loss, the loss of almost his entire fortune, and of all the distress that had come to him through her, indirectly, of course, but still through her. A man's love? After all, what did she know of a man's love? The feeling of permanency and security she had felt in his love — what had she based it on? How could she know that it would be strong enough to last through continued suffering and hardships?

"Forgive me, dear. I shouldn't worry you with all this. You've enough to bear as it is. I think I felt unusually depressed to-day or I shouldn't have brought this up. Put it all aside,

try to forget it; we will find some way out of it all yet."

But she knew the note of cheerfulness was forced, and she went home with a sense of dread still heavy within her.

With restless, almost feverish eagerness, she looked forward to their next meeting, hoping it would help her, that he would be different, more like he used to be, that in some way he would lighten this feeling of gloom that was over her. And yet how often lately she had looked forward to their meetings with this same hope, only to come away more despondent than ever.

It was just two minutes of four the next afternoon when she reached the seventy-second subway station. She was a little surprised and hurt to find that he was not already there.

While the appointment was for four o'clock, he had always made it a rule to be several moments early. She could not recall a time in which he had not been there first; he had often said he never wanted to have her wait for him. That humiliation, at least, he could spare her.

Four o'clock! Five — ten — twenty minutes after! Her feelings alternated between anxiety

and indignation. But as train after train passed and did not bring him, she forgot her resentment in a sick fear and apprehension. In an agony of suspense she watched the crowd pour off from every train as the guards swung back the gates. There seemed to her something sinister in all these strange faces among which she could not find his.

Something had happened! Should she go back to her apartment, where he could reach her by telephone? There was no way he could get any message to her here. The clock over the ticket agent's window pointed now to a quarter of five. She would wait for one more train.

She caught a glimpse of her face in the glass of a slot machine. How pale she was! The girl behind the news stand was watching her curiously. She walked to the far end of the platform. By leaning forward she could see the red lights of a train speeding toward her through the black gaping tunnel. A moment later it had drawn up by the platform. The gates were open. He was not there! And then she saw him coming toward her — hurrying from the last car.

After the first throb of joy and relief, all her

indignation returned. She did not move to meet him.

"I'm sorry to be late," he said quietly.

Margaret caught her breath. She had expected the most profuse apologies and regrets. He said nothing more. In silence he led her up out of the subway and through a quiet street.

At length she turned to him, her face burning hotly.

"And that's all? You kept me waiting there almost an hour — and you've no explanations?"

"None that you would consider adequate. I might invent one," bitterly. "I'm being constantly forced into lying to her, but I'd hoped that I might continue to tell you the truth."

"I don't think I understand," coldly. "Do you mean that it was possible for you to have prevented this?"

"It was *possible* — yes."

She knew this mood; she had seen much of it lately. It was a sort of defiant bitterness that he had come to assume when the difficulties of his position weighed too heavily upon him — when he felt too keenly his helplessness. That his heart was full of the deepest pain and remorse for having subjected her to this long wait in a

public place, she knew; and that, whatever he might say, his delay had been unavoidable, she also knew. She knew now that he had been detained by *her,* for some trivial thing that he was helpless to prevent, and it was that fact which so embittered him.

Her resentment suddenly vanished before a finer understanding and sympathy as she laid her hand on his arm with a gentle,

"It's all right, dear. You need make no excuse or explanation. In a way I think I understand."

Instantly his expression changed to one of quivering tenderness.

"Do you mean that, Margaret — that you're willing to put this aside without any explanation at all, to believe it was unavoidable without knowing why, without even my assertion that it was?"

"Yes."

Then he stooped over her with the tone and words she so loved to hear, and that he only used when most deeply moved.

"Margaret, dear little girl!"

And in that moment she felt nearer to him than

she had for days. There was a long, intimate silence, then he said slowly,

"But I want to explain it — I owe you that. It is the least I can do."

"No — no, not if for any reason you would rather not."

"I think now I would rather tell you. I suppose you know who it was that kept me?"

"Yes, I know now."

"She came down to the office about half past three and wanted me to go with her to have a ring re-set. I told her I was sorry, but that I had an appointment at four. Something in my manner and my failure to tell her what the appointment was must have aroused her suspicions, for she became very insistent. The jeweller was around on Maiden Lane and I thought I'd have time to go with her and still meet you at four. But she seemed to resent my haste, and did everything she could to detain me. At the last moment, she decided to have two more stones added to the setting and forced me to stay and help select them. I felt she was doing it purposely, that she believed I had an engagement with you and was determined to delay me. She managed

the situation so I couldn't leave without being deliberately rude to her before the clerk. And I couldn't do that."

"No — of course not," trying to force back the indignation that was again rising within her. And that was why she had waited three-quarters of an hour at a subway station? He had been selecting jewels for her!

"Now you're hurt! It would have been better if I'd taken you at your word and not explained. You think I should have left at any risk."

"I did not say that."

"No, it wasn't necessary. I knew my explanation would seem wholly inadequate to you — it does to me. And yet if it were to happen again in the same way, I couldn't do differently. But I see now that I should have lied to you, that I should have invented some accident, something that would have made it physically impossible for me to get here. That would have saved your sense of pride. I don't know why I didn't, except that I always want to tell you the truth. I feel that when we begin to lie to each other we will have nothing left."

XI

THE ANGUISH OF LOVING

WITH Katherine Reeves, Margaret's social amenities had ended with the first visit. Katherine had returned the call that same week and since then had repeatedly telephoned her, with invitations to luncheons or the matinée. But Margaret had always made excuses.

There were times when she made them reluctantly, when she longed to flee from her own brooding thoughts, when she would have been glad to have been within reach of Katherine's light-hearted gaiety. But she could never dispel the impressions of her first visit, and the feeling that for many reasons it would be best to let it end there.

Her reluctance to renew the old friendship with Katherine, her gradual withdrawal from almost every one she knew, was the inevitable result of her life with him. Consciously or uncon-

sciously, her every act was now affected by that. She seemed to have lost the power of acting spontaneously; everything had to be weighed as to its possible influence on their love.

It was early one Sunday morning that she received a message from Katherine, saying she was very ill and begging her to come. It was an appeal that could not be refused. She hurriedly ordered a cab and was dressed by the time it came. Yet she was filled with reluctance, with a feeling that fate was forcing her into something she had tried to avoid.

It was very rare that he could be with her on Sundays, but before she started she left Katherine's telephone number at the desk, saying if any one called to ask them to 'phone her there.

The door was opened by the same French maid that Margaret had noticed on her first visit, but now her face was full of distress.

"Miss Katherine's been crying all night — she won't let me send for a doctor or do anything for her." There was genuine anxiety in her voice.

"She's in here?" asked Margaret as she passed through the hall to the bedroom. She entered the darkened room and went over to the bed

where Katherine lay with her face to the wall.

"Oh, I was so afraid you wouldn't come," she sobbed, as Margaret sat down on the edge of the bed and took one of her hot hands.

"I told the maid I would when she 'phoned — didn't she tell you?"

"Yes — yes, but I was afraid you wouldn't. I wanted to send for you last night — but . . ." The words recalled something afresh, and she burst into more violent weeping.

Margaret soothed her as best she could, but already her heart was filled with an indefinable dread.

"Don't cry like that, dear; you'll only make yourself worse. Nothing in life is worth such tears." But she felt the hollowness of her platitudes even as she said them.

"Oh, you don't know — you don't *know!*" moaned Katherine, turning her face back to the wall.

Her heavy hair lay in a beautiful disordered mass over the pillow. Through the delicate lace of her nightgown could be seen the whiteness of her neck and arms. Her alluring, voluptuous beauty forced itself upon Margaret anew. The blue satin coverlet and embroidered sheets

seemed essentially a part of the atmosphere that always surrounded her.

Suddenly she drew a crumpled letter from under the pillow.

"It's from Ed — Mr. Walton. Read it — turn on the lights and read it!"

Margaret shrank back. "Oh, no — no!"

"Yes, read it!" imperatively. "I *want* you to! I must tell some one — I shall go mad if I don't."

"No — no, don't tell me anything now, Katherine — not while you're so excited. You might regret it afterwards. One is so often sorry for the things they tell in a moment of impulse."

"Oh, I don't care — I don't care for anything now. I never shall. He's left me! *He's left me!*"

She half rose as she spoke and looked at Margaret with wretched, appealing eyes, as though in some vague way she hoped to have her words denied, to be told that it was not true. But Margaret could only gaze down at the coverlet in conscious miserable silence. She lay back again, smothering her sobs in the pillow. In a few moments, she once more held out the letter.

"Read it — I *want* you to read it."

"I can't. Don't ask me."

"Then I'll tell you. He says it's ended — forever! That it'll be useless for me to make any efforts to see him again. If I write — my letters will not be opened! If I 'phone — he'll hang up the receiver!"

"How unutterably cruel!" breathed Margaret.

"Cruel? He has always been cruel — and yet — I love him — I *love* him!" She had half risen again. "Oh, I want you to *know* now — you can think I'm bad and shameless if you want. I've been everything to him for two years. It never seemed wrong because I loved him so! And now — now — he has deserted me!"

"Oh, Katherine — be careful! The maid is in the next room," murmured Margaret, feeling as though she were going to faint.

"Marie? Oh, she knows already — she has all along. But she adores me — she's absolutely loyal. But if she wasn't, I wouldn't care now! Do you understand? I don't care for *anything* now! Oh, what shall I do — what shall I do?

He said he would never leave me — he swore it — and now — now —"

She was sitting up in bed, clasping her knees and rocking back and forth, staring straight in front of her with great grief-stricken eyes. She noticed neither Margaret's silence nor her white, drawn face.

"He will not even see me! I have a box full of letters vowing that he would love and protect and be kind to me always — and now — if I write my letters will not be opened, and if I telephone he will hang up the receiver."

The last phrase she said in a sort of chant; evidently she had repeated it over and over. It had been seared into her mind.

For over an hour Margaret tried in vain to quiet her. She persisted in torturing them both by talking of the days when she had been so happy with him, comparing his love and devotion then with his cruelty now.

In her desperate, reckless grief, she seemed to have lost all sense of reticence. She told of the most intimate details of their lives — incidents before which Margaret paled and shrank. She even had Marie unlock and bring to the bed a box of letters. Margaret felt she could bear no more.

The similarity to her own box of letters was intolerable. There were many telegrams and many envelopes with special delivery stamps — just as there were among *his* letters.

When, in spite of her protests, Katherine started to read aloud a note dated just a year ago that day: "Sweetheart, I was so sorry I could not take you out to dinner last night . . ." Margaret started up with a haunted cry.

"Katherine, if you read any of those letters aloud, I shall have to leave you."

Katherine let the letter slip from her hand as she fell back among the pillows. She lay perfectly still. For a while, at least, she had worn herself out. Margaret put the letters in the box and locked them away again. Then she drew a low chair by the bed and waited silently, hoping that Katherine would fall asleep. But she did not sleep. In a little while she was moaning and crying again. And so it was through all the long afternoon.

When it grew dusk, Margaret slipped into the dining room and consulted with Marie about getting a nurse. She felt that she could not stay through the night, and Katherine was in no condition to be left alone with a maid. But Kath-

erine divined the purpose of the whispered consultation and burst into a passionate protest.

"Don't leave me with a nurse! If you do I shall tell her *everything!* I know I will — I can't help it! I can't keep from talking about it, and if a nurse is here I shall talk to her. Can't you stay with me, Margaret? Can't you — just to-night?"

Margaret hesitated. It seemed cruel to leave her and yet . . .

"I would do it for you." There was no reproach in her voice, only a note of despair.

The words swept through Margaret. She knew they were true. Had their positions been reversed, Katherine would not only have stayed with her, but would have showered on her all the wealth of love and sympathy of her nature. Her loyalty, her unselfishness, her generous giving up of self had been tested many times in their school days.

And now with a rush of remorse Margaret realised how cold and apart had been her sympathy. How, in her heart, she had stood aloof, had made no effort to control her involuntary shrinking. Her attempts to soothe and quiet

had been merely perfunctory. A stranger would have done as much.

But now she stooped over the bed and kissed her with a sudden warmth.

"I'll stay, Katherine — I'll stay as long as you need me."

Katherine clung to her in piteous gratitude. Later, when through sheer exhaustion she fell asleep, Margaret went over and silently drawing up the shade, sat by the open window. The street lamps were already lit. The faint organ strains of an old and familiar hymn from some near-by church seemed strangely incongruous with the whirling automobiles and cabs.

Mechanically her mind fitted the words to the strains. And her thought drifted back to a small village church where all through her childhood she had heard that hymn, where Sunday after Sunday she had sat in the same hard pew through long, drowsy sermons and then, in the afternoon, come back for "Sunday school."

How vividly she recalled it all, even the slight musty odour which seemed always to linger about; the narrow strip of carpet down the aisle, the lamps with tin reflectors, which hung at

intervals along the wall; the blackboard on an easel, that stood in a corner during church, and was brought up on the pulpit for Sunday school. There was always a drawing in coloured chalk to illustrate the lesson. One of them she never forgot. In blue and yellow was outlined a hill with two roads, one smooth and broad leading around the base, with a guide post marked "Road to Sin," and the other narrow and rocky leading to the top, with a guide post "Way of Righteousness." Over the hill was a red crown and sceptre.

It was not the lesson, carefully pointed out by the long index finger of the Superintendent, that had so impressed her, but the wasted possibilities of the coloured chalk. Why had they not made the hill green and the crown yellow?

She rarely heard the lessons. She would gaze out of the open windows at the sunshine glistening on leafy tree-tops, at the birds shrilly chattering, and dream vague, fanciful dreams of the great world that lay far beyond even the farthest line of hills on the horizon, and of all the wonderful things it held for her, when she reached the magic "grown-up" period.

And then she would walk home through

shaded, sleepy streets and spend the rest of the long summer afternoon lying on the grass under one of the big trees in the orchard, reading some romance of Scott or Bulwer Lytton, revelling in chivalry and adventure, her own vivid imagination filling in the parts she could not understand.

The flapping of the blind against the window sill and her slight movement to adjust it, brought her mind back with a start. For a moment the dimly-lit room before her seemed less real than the little village church and the atmosphere of droning bees in the old orchard.

"Ed — Ed!" murmured Katherine in her sleep.

In the street below, the dark figure of a woman drew away from the man beside her and covered her face with her hands. Margaret could not hear her, but she knew she was weeping. A street lamp lit up the man's face, which was harsh and impatient. He said something, and the woman shrank farther away. But he caught her by the arm and drew her on.

It was only another note of the great city's misery — of man's brutality to woman. The woman in the street below, Katherine calling

her lover's name in her sleep, and her own life — were they but different phases? Was there an inevitable destiny against which it was useless to struggle? Was her love to end in misery, too? Not, perhaps, in the way Katherine's had ended; but the variations of misery are infinite.

Already she saw in his failing business, his reckless losses, his growing discouragement and moodiness, a source of wretchedness more poignant than that of desertion. To feel that she had been the cause of wrecking the career of the man she loved, of weakening his courage and destroying his ambition — than that, surely there could be no greater anguish.

A sudden, startling ring of the telephone! Before the first peal ended, Katherine had sprung from the bed, crying, "Ed — Ed!" and was at the instrument before Margaret could reach her.

A second later, it seemed to Margaret that she had never seen anything so pitiful as the dying out of the radiant joy and hope in her face as she turned and held out the receiver with a whispered, "It's for you!" then with a moan flung herself on the bed.

The dear familiarness of his voice! For Kath-

erine's sake, she tried to keep the joy out of hers as she answered. He said he had telephoned to her apartment and they had given him this number. If she were coming home later, he would be glad to come after her.

She explained that she could not go home, but would he not call here? She *did* want to see him if only for a few moments. He said he would come at once — in less than an hour.

Katherine was still sobbing heart-brokenly, her face turned to the wall.

"I'm sorry, dear, I should have told you I was expecting a call here."

"It will be like that all the time," she moaned. "I know he'll never telephone me again — I *know* it. And yet, every time the bell rings, there'll always be that wild hope that it is he! Oh, I want to get away from these rooms — I want to go somewhere where I shall never hear a telephone — for the very sound *means him* — it always will."

"The very sound means him"— Margaret flinched at the words. For months it had meant that to her. A telephone ring, even in a shop or restaurant, anywhere she chanced to be, had always brought the same wild thought — that in

some way he had found out where she was and was calling her.

Suddenly Katherine turned and caught her hands. "Do *you* think he will ever come back to me? Do you *feel* that he will? Later, when he begins to miss me — to realise how much I was in his life? Say that you think he will — that if I stay here and wait — in the end he will come back!"

Margaret could only hold her hands in wretched helpless silence, and Katherine turned once more to the wall.

"He will never come back," she whispered, "he will never come back."

"If he knew you were ill and suffering like this . . ."

Katherine laughed hysterically. "He anticipated that — one of the last things he said was for me never to get sick and send for him."

"Katherine, Katherine, can't you see the deliberate calculated cruelty of such a remark — and the nature of the man who could say that? Can't you realise that he isn't worth your grieving?"

"And do you think that, or anything else, would make any difference? I love him!"

Before that unswearable argument Margaret was silent.

Fearing the shock of another unexpected ring, she explained a little later that some one was to call.

"You'll not mind if I leave you for a few moments? I'll see them down in the reception room and come back at once."

"But you needn't go down there," suggested Katherine weakly. "You can receive any one right here in the front room or the library."

"That will not be worth while. It'll be for only a few moments, and I'd just as soon go down."

Involuntarily she recoiled from the thought of seeing him in that apartment, and was relieved that Katherine offered no further protest.

A few moments later she went down to meet him. He was standing by the window. There was no one else in the reception room. He came forward and took both her hands.

"Margaret! What is it? I've never seen you look so pale and tired."

"It's Katherine — Katherine Reeves; she's quite ill. I can't tell you about it — don't ask me! But say something to drive away these

cold horrors! Tell me that you love me — that you're true and sincere — that you always will be — that —"

"Sweetheart — sweetheart! You're all unstrung! Come over here." He led her to a divan. "You *know* I love you. Do I need to tell you that? And I love you too much to let you stay here. You're too sensitive to be around any one who's sick. I'm going to take you home."

"No — no, I must stay! She needs me — she needs me piteously. She won't let me send for a nurse — she would rather be alone."

"There's no nurse? You're alone with her?" he demanded sternly.

"It's not a case for a nurse. I can't tell you about it — but I must stay. It would be cruel if I left her to-night."

Reluctantly he yielded. Perhaps he divined something of what it was, for he gave her unstintedly of what she most wanted; he responded generously to her need. Never had he made her feel more deeply the strength and earnestness of his love, never had she felt more sure of its endurance. Even after he had gone, his words seemed still to surround her with an atmosphere of warmth, of protection, of security.

Katherine was lying as she had left her, still moaning,

"Ed — Ed!"

With a deepening pity and tenderness that came from the warmth and glow of her own happier love, Margaret lay down beside her and drew her into her arms.

XII

THE WIFE'S APPEAL

THE house was dark except for a faint light in the hall. He looked at his watch. It was half past one. After leaving Margaret he had taken a long, wandering walk, his mind full of her and of her involuntary appeal. Stronger than usual was his reluctance to meet the questions and suspicions that awaited him at home.

And now, late as it was, he went back into the library, turned on the shaded light, drew up an easy chair, and reached over for cigars and matches. He felt he could not go up stairs just yet; the possibility of finding her still awake, of having to listen to complaints and reproaches, was one he could not meet just then. He wanted to be alone with his thoughts, with the memory of those few moments with Margaret.

He had felt her love, her clinging dependence, her need of him, as he had never felt them before. There had been something in her appeal that had stirred the deepest tenderness of his love. And

he realised now, with keen anxiety, how wan and thin she had grown. It was not merely the result of one day's strain, however severe that might have been. He knew it was the wearing strain of all these months, of the difficulties of their position, the anxieties, the constant dread of some impending crisis — it had told upon her sadly.

It seemed to him now that he must find some way to be with her at once, to care for her and make her well and strong again. At that moment his duty seemed to be clearly to *her* — to take his place beside her, to shield and protect her at any cost.

And yet, as he glanced around the room, the claims of his wife reasserted themselves. His wife's picture on the desk before him, another on the mantel, everything spoke of *her* and her claim.

There was a sound of steps on the stairs — in the hall. The curtains were pushed aside and she stood in the library door clad only in her nightgown.

"Why, Mary, I thought you were asleep," with a feeble disingenuousness for which he hated himself.

"You know very well I couldn't sleep, that I can never sleep, when you stay out late like this."

"Don't you think that is very foolish? Wouldn't it be better if you did?" He rose and threw a smoking jacket, which lay on the couch, around her shoulders. "You'll take cold that way."

"Would you care? Does it make any difference what happens to me now?" bitterly.

"If you're going to commence that, I think you'd better go back up stairs."

"No, I want to talk to you. That's what I came down for. You were with that woman tonight — I know! How much longer do you think I can stand this? How much longer do you think any wife would stand it — knowing that her husband went out day after day with some other woman — a disreputable woman."

She saw the lines around his mouth grow tense, and it goaded her on. "Yes, a *disreputable* — a bad, fast woman, or she wouldn't go with another woman's husband."

He was looking steadily before him, but the hand that held the cigar trembled.

"Why don't you answer me?"

He did not move or speak.

"Why don't you answer me?" she repeated fiercely, her voice rising in her excitement.

"I have nothing to say when you talk in that way; surely you must know that."

For a moment she looked at him helplessly, then threw herself on the couch in a passion of tears.

"Oh, I know it's because I said she was bad! You love her! She has thrown some hateful infatuation about you. And you're deserting your wife, who has been faithful to you for all these years, for a woman like that! Oh, I can't stand it — I can't! I shall kill myself if you don't give her up!"

When her sobs gradually lost their note of fierce anger and became deep and piteous, he laid aside his cigar and came slowly toward her. He touched her arm awkwardly, and there was a forced gentleness in his voice.

"This is all needless, Mary. You work yourself up into these passions for no cause. You bring it all on yourself. If you would try to control your unreasonable jealousy, we would both be much happier."

"You mean — that you don't love her?" she cried, with a pitiful touch of hope.

As she raised her swollen, tear-blotched face, he loathed himself for the feeling of almost physical repulsion that swept over him, and because of it he brought a note of real tenderness into his voice.

"Why, of course not," he tried to smile. "Do you think after all these years we have lived together that I'm likely to fall in love with any one now?"

She looked at him, half believing, longing to be convinced and yet feeling that it was not true. In her scant nightgown, which plainly exposed the bones of her neck, and only half hid the angular lines of her figure, with her tear-bleared eyes and swollen face, she had never seemed so unlovely. With a feeling of mingled pity and delicacy, instinctively he averted his gaze. Perhaps she felt something of what was in his mind, for suddenly, with an inarticulate cry, she threw herself against him, clinging to him in mute appeal.

He put his arm about her and soothed her as best he could. He even kissed her on the forehead, hating himself for the inward shrinking that he could not control. After a few moments, she drew away and, still sobbing, went back up

stairs. When he heard the door of her room close after her, he sank on a chair by the desk, his head in his hands.

For almost an hour he sat there, motionless. When he rose and went up stairs his face was worn and haggard. No sound came from her room, and the transom over the door was dark. He moved softly about lest he awaken her. But when he turned off his own light and lay gazing at the wavering shadows on the wall, reflected from the lights of the street, he caught the faint sound of a muffled sobbing. It did not seem to come from her room.

He rose, tapped on her door, but there was no answer. Then he pushed the door open. In the darkness he could faintly discern the bed, undisturbed in its white smoothness. She was not there!

He switched on the lights in the hall and ran up to the third story. The sobs grew plainer. In one of the spare rooms he found her, lying on the bed, her face to the wall. She started up with a cry when she heard him.

"Why did you come up here?" he asked gently.

She sobbed some indistinct reply. And then he lay down beside her and threw his arm over her shoulder.

"I'm going to stay here with you now — try to sleep."

Perhaps she felt that words would not help them, that he was giving her the best he could, all that was now in his power, for she said nothing more.

Until dawn he lay there — awake. The wretchedness of his position had never seemed so great, his treachery to this woman, who was his wife, had never seemed so despicable. He was wrecking the lives of two women — two women who loved him and depended upon him for their happiness. And he was failing them both. But what could he do? How could he now put either of them out of his life? And yet, to go on in this way, meant only misery for all three.

Sooner or later he would have to choose — he would have to sacrifice one.

XIII

A MAGAZINE STORY

STANDFORD'S MAGAZINE
EDITORIAL ROOMS

Sept. 2, 1909.

DEAR MISS WARNER:

In the hope that now at the last moment you may reconsider your decision and allow us to use your name as the author of "The Immutable," we are holding the magazine open until the messenger returns.

As we have told you in a previous letter, we consider this the best story you have written. It is because of its strength and brevity that we have rushed it through into this number, although the magazine was already made up and we had to take out another article to make room for it. And it seems to us extremely whimsical, not to say foolish, to issue it under any other name than your own.

The magazine goes to press at once, but we can still change the name in the table of contents and on the title page if you will instruct us to do so by the messenger.

Very truly yours,

J. M. ARNOLD,
Editor.

THE boy was waiting in the hall. Twice she read the letter and then drew some note paper toward her.

DEAR MR. ARNOLD:

I yield to your request — you may publish the story under my own name. I had no other reason for my wish to assume a pseudonym in this story, except the desire to know what a few people would think of my work when they did not know it was mine — a reason that I now feel is wholly inadequate. But as you are probably accustomed, by long suffering, to the vagaries of authors, I trust you will not think too severely of this.

Most sincerely,

MARGARET WARNER.

Without waiting to re-read it, she enclosed the note in an envelope. As she crossed over to the door, the stillness of the room was insistent. And as the boy reached out his hand for the envelope there was to her something almost sinister in the act; even his careless, good-natured face loomed up ominously before her. She watched him down the hall and heard the click of the elevator door as it closed after him.

It had gone — her consent to the use of her own name to *that* story. The magazine was going to press. On the twentieth it would be on every news stand in the country. The twentieth — eighteen more days!

Her glance fell on the telephone. She could still stop it. To-morrow would be too late; it would have passed through then. But now — there was yet time.

But she made no motion toward the telephone. Then suddenly it came to her with a hideous certainty that all along, in her heart, she had wanted it published under her name. She had been only deceiving herself when she feigned otherwise.

She thought of the night she had written it, the night she had worked feverishly until morning, oblivious of weariness or need of sleep, swept on by the force of the story. It was built upon what he had told her of his wife; she had used his very words, haunting, compelling, in their naked truth.

The next day she had read it over with a feeling almost of terror — it rang so true. That she should have used his confidence in this way! It was a flagrant betrayal of his trust. It must never be published — she had told herself that again and again.

And yet within a week she had sent the manuscript to *Standford's Magazine,* assuaging her conscience by the condition that it be published under a pseudonym. And now she had withdrawn even that! In eighteen days the story would stand before the public under her own name.

To the public it would be only an interesting, well-written story. But to the man who loved and had trusted her, when he saw the details of the most intimate struggles of his life laid bare in a story — what would it mean to him? And to his wife — when she read of his love for another woman, the woman who had written that story — what would it mean to her?

Published under another name, the story might never be seen by either of them, and if it were, it would be construed as merely a strange coincidence. But, under her own name — what would be the result? What misery and wreckage might it not bring to them all?

There was still time to recall her consent; she could still stop the use of her name. The messenger had not yet reached the office. She flew to the telephone.

"3834 Madison."

As she waited for the number, the door bell rang. Again it rang — a loud, persistent ring. She dropped the receiver and turned impatiently to the door. It was another messenger with a note addressed in *his* writing. Unmindful of the receiver dangling from the telephone, she tore open the envelope.

Fate seems to be against us. Am afraid we will have to give up the opera this evening. Last night, while I was asleep, some one found the tickets in my pocket. She denies this, claims she found them on the floor, that they had fallen out. But as they were in my inside vest pocket — I hardly think that possible.

She accused me bitterly of intending to take you, so there was nothing to do but say I had bought them for her and forgotten to speak of it. Now I shall have to take her — there is no other way.

A blinding jealousy swept over her. She turned back to the dangling receiver.

"Hello — hello!" Central shrilled angrily. "Didn't you call 3834 Madison?"

"Yes — but it was a mistake. I don't want them now." And Margaret threw up the receiver.

. . . . . .

The next two weeks were filled with a brooding dread. As the twentieth, the day of issue, drew near, Margaret grew more and more nervous and apprehensive.

The only reparation she could now make was to tell him of the story before it came out — so that he might try to keep it from his wife. But she had not the courage to tell him — she shrank from it with increasing fear. What effect might it not have on his already depressed and moody

condition to know that she had embodied some of the most intimate and painful details of his life in a story? Might he not even doubt the sincerity of her love when she could use these things for material?

With his own reticent and secretive nature — could he ever understand such a betrayal of his confidence? Could she ever make him understand that the story had written itself, that it had seemed a thing outside of her control? And even if she could make him realise how it had been written — could he ever understand or forgive its publication?

It was not until the eighteenth, just two days before the date of issue, that she at length forced herself to tell him. It was late in the afternoon; he had called for a few moments on his way home from the office. She told him simply, without any effort at justification and without reservations, the details of the story and of its coming publication.

She kept her eyes fixed on an envelope which she had picked up from the desk and which she tore into thin strips as she spoke. When she finished, there was a long silence. Still she did

not look up; she was piecing the strips together again.

"You hate me! You think it a despicable thing! Oh, I know — I know . . ." Her voice broke to a sob.

"No," he answered quietly. "Six months ago I might, but now, before the evidence of my own weakness, I cannot blame you for yours. I could not blame *her,* even when I knew she had gone through my desk, opened my letters, and listened at the library door. Formerly she would have been utterly incapable of such things, but now —" He paused. "I have come to believe that love and jealousy can change one's whole nature."

There was another silence which she made no attempt to break.

"As for the magazine reaching her, I do not think it will be difficult to prevent that. The fashion magazines are the only ones she ever buys herself — she depends on me to bring home the others. While she usually reads them, she wouldn't be enough interested to ask for any special one, or even to miss it. The only danger lies in some one sending it to her."

"But there's no one to do that — no one knows . . ."

"Then I don't think you need have any fear about it."

"And you mean — you mean that you don't despise me for publishing that story? Oh, but you will — you will when you've read it, when you realise all that I have put into it!"

"Would you rather I wouldn't read it?"

She looked at him incredulously.

"If it will help you — I will promise that."

Margaret knew that she would have been utterly unable to keep such a promise — and yet she felt that he would keep it.

"No, I think I'd rather you *would* read it. The dread of it would always hang over me if you didn't. But don't read it now — not for a few weeks at least. We have seemed so far apart lately, there's been so much to depress us. Wait, perhaps things will be happier."

Then she broke off and added, hopelessly, "Oh, I suppose that is only a foolish fancy — I don't see how things can be different, and yet I've the feeling that I'd rather you would not read it now,— that I want you to wait."

"Poor little girl! I know things don't look

very hopeful, and it seems to me that I'm more and more helpless to make any radical change. But since there's so little that I can do for you, I'll gladly do this. I'll not even open the magazine until I have your consent. Will that help any?"

"A great deal," she smiled up at him faintly. For a moment she felt that some of the burden had been lifted from her.

But when he had gone, she told herself that he had not yet read the story, that after all she had given him only the vaguest outlines. Might it not be very different when he really saw it in print? But at least she had the assurance that he would not read it now, and she felt she could trust implicitly in that promise.

Two days later the magazine was on the news stands. Margaret first saw it in a small stationery shop around the corner from her hotel. In one swift glance she swept through the contents. "The Immutable," by Margaret Warner, page 149. Illustrated by F. T. Kempton.

Illustrated! She had not known that there were to be any illustrations. It had been rushed through so quickly, she had not thought there would be time for that. And they had sent her

no proofs. "F. T. Kempton"—the name was vaguely familiar, but she could not recall his work. Hurriedly her nervous fingers ran through the pages—149, then over to the next page on which was the drawing.

An impossibly tall and slender woman of the fashion-plate type, whose clasped hands and upturned face had the effect of the cheapest melodrama, while in the background was the debonair figure of a man pulling at his moustache in the stereotyped manner.

The angry colour flamed in her face. That her story should be disfigured by such a drawing! It seemed inconceivable that the magazine should have allowed it to go through. Then she remembered something that Mr. Arnold, the editor, had said a few weeks ago about the growing demand of the public for illustrations in which the expressionless face and fashionable attire of the women were the dominant note.

But she soon forgot the picture as her eyes ran over the story with tense absorption. There were sentences that stood out with startling, accusing clearness. How merciless it seemed in type! And yet she was conscious of a certain

thrill at seeing his very words on that printed page. Did she want him to see them too? Was there in her heart something of pride, of exultation, that she could take an incident in their lives, use his own words and make of them a story so vital and dramatic?

She laid the magazine aside, only to pick it up again and again, to pore over passages, phrases, words. All that day and the next she lived in the atmosphere of the story. When she saw him and he made no reference to the issue of the magazine, she hardly knew whether her feeling was that of relief or disappointment.

When the magazine had been on the news stand three weeks and she knew that it had not reached Mrs. Whitman, Margaret felt that the chances of her seeing it were very slight. Periodicals are read soon after they are issued and not at the end of the month. In another week the December number would take its place.

In all that time he had made no reference to the story. They passed many news stands, even stood before them at elevated and subway stations, where the magazine was conspicuously displayed, but his glance never sought it. And

always before when one of her stories appeared he could not pass a stand without making some comment or buying a copy.

His silence now was a keen contrast to the pride and interest he had always shown. But Margaret felt that he had kept his promise, that, whatever his thoughts were, he had not read the story. And as his silence about it was so plainly intentional, she could meet it only with silence.

XIV

A TRAGEDY

"KATHERINE!"

"I didn't send up my card. I thought you wouldn't mind."

"No, of course not. I'm glad you came. I've been so worried about you. Every time I 'phoned the maid said you were out."

"I know," her voice was colourless. "I didn't want to see any one." The veil and drooping hat brim only partly shaded her features. Margaret could see that she was pale and thin. And yet her beauty seemed as striking as ever. The light cloth gown clung to the curves of her form, and there was about her that air of grace, of flowing easy motion, peculiarly her own.

She had not taken the chair Margaret had drawn forward, but was walking nervously around the room. Suddenly she turned.

"I'm going to his office."

"You're going to his office?"

"Yes, I'm going now. I cannot bear it any longer."

"But, Katherine — what will that mean? You said he would never change."

"I know," sadly, "I still feel that. But I shall see him," passionately. "Do you know what it will mean to me just to see him?"

"Oh, Katherine, you mustn't — you mustn't do that!"

"Why?" defiantly.

"Your pride — your sense of —"

"And do you think I have any pride left? Any sense of decency even? I stood on the corner by his house last night for over an hour — just to see him pass!"

"Katherine! And he saw you?"

"No, but I know now that I wouldn't have cared if he had."

Margaret made no answer. She was clasping and unclasping her hands as she always did when most deeply stirred.

"Have you any wine or cognac here? I must have something."

"I've some cognac, but is it good for you now?" Then suddenly, "You don't do that — do you, Katherine?"

"What? Drink?" She laughed harshly. "I never have. But I'd do anything now that would help me."

Margaret brought her a glass of cognac, refraining from any more comments. Unconsciously her hand rested on a small package Katherine had laid on the table. She picked it up. Instantly Katherine sprang forward and took it from her.

"Don't — don't touch that!" Then she laughed, a little hysterically. "It's only some of his letters. I — I'm taking them back to him. It's foolish, of course, but for the moment I couldn't bear to think of any one touching them."

It was not until afterward that Margaret thought of the weight of the package, a weight wholly inconsistent with a package of letters.

"You've heard nothing from him since — since that night?" Margaret asked hesitatingly.

"Nothing — not one word."

"And you? Have you written?"

"Twice."

"And your letters?"

"Have come back unopened."

"Oh, Katherine, Katherine — *don't* go to him!

Can't you see what type of man he is? He will only hurt and humiliate you more!"

"I must see him. It is useless to talk to me. *I must see him!*"

And Margaret felt the futility of saying anything more.

A strange unrest haunted Margaret all that afternoon. Twice she went to the telephone to call up Katherine's apartment and find out if she had returned. But something restrained her. She struggled against the depression that grew heavier every hour. Her heart ached in passionate protest against the cold cruelty of the man.

Had Katherine really gone to his office? What had been their meeting? Should she have made a more persistent effort to restrain her? Might she have done more for her? She could have at least insisted on her coming back to spend the night. She pictured Katherine returning alone to her rooms, rooms that were filled with memories of him.

She passed an almost sleepless night. Her thoughts were on Katherine, but in the background was always the consciousness of her own life, a consciousness she tried to force down. She felt the same shrinking dread that she had

felt that first day in Katherine's apartment, and yet — Many things hovered obstinately in her mind.

In the morning she felt unequal to going down to the dining room and had her breakfast sent up. Two letters and the morning paper were on the side of the tray. She was opening one of the letters when her glance fell on the paper.

A SUICIDE IN PROMINENT BROKER'S OFFICE.
BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN SHOOTS
HERSELF IN E. H. WALTON'S
WALL STREET OFFICE.

NAMES HAVE BEEN CONNECTED FOR PAST
TWO YEARS. RUMORS THAT WALTON
DESERTED HER. WALTON RE-
FUSES TO TALK.

The black headlines blurred before her. She could read no more.

It was days before the horror of it left her, days before she could think of it without the anguished self-reproach that she might have prevented it, that she should not have let her go.

The most harrowing part of it all was the packing of Katherine's things. She had left a letter asking that everything be shipped to an invalid aunt, her only near relative, who lived in a

small Wisconsin village. She had requested that no one but Margaret and her maid Marie should pack and arrange the things for shipment. It was a request that could not be refused, but it was a task that took all Margaret's strength and courage.

That the letter was written over two weeks before her death showed how long Katherine had brooded over this final termination of it all. Her visit to Walton's office was the last desperate attempt to win him back. The package she had carried and which she told Margaret was letters, was a small silver-mounted revolver.

Margaret could never bring herself to read the newspaper details. But from Marie, who sobbed and talked about it constantly, she could not help but hear many things which seared into her mind, from which she flinched and shrank, and yet around which her imagination lingered with a sort of horrible fascination.

With the incongruity, the seeming intentional lack of sympathy that nature so often shows with our most tragic moments, it was a clear radiant day when, a week later, Margaret raised the drawn blinds of Katherine's apartment to begin

her work. The sunshine flooded in, falling in bright streaks across the blue satin quilt, and over a lace negligee still lying on a chair where she had left it. Nothing had been touched; everything was as it had been when Katherine walked out of the apartment the week before.

The odour of violets still hung about the room, some shell hairpins lay scattered on the dressing table. A powder puff lay outside of its silver box, and a white comb held a long shining hair. One of the small drawers of the dressing table was partly open, showing a confusion of lace handkerchiefs, fans and jewellery. Margaret remembered that it was from this drawer Katherine had taken the locket which held his picture. Involuntarily she drew back, sick with the dread of what lay before her. How could she pack these things? How could she touch them?

Marie was almost useless, for she cried afresh over every intimate belonging. The girl had been devotedly attached to Katherine, and her grief now was inconsolable.

Besides the box of letters, the place was literally strewn with his notes. Margaret found them thrust beneath the paper that lined the drawers,

in the bottom of glove and handkerchief cases, in every compartment of her desk, even beneath the tissue paper of some bandboxes.

At first she wondered why in these weeks of his desertion Katherine had not collected these, why she had left them to be constant reminders of the past. But soon she felt the reason. Katherine had wanted to leave everything unchanged — it had helped her in the delusion that he might come back.

Between her sobs, Marie told her that in the last few weeks "Miss Katherine" had dressed and ordered a special dinner every Wednesday evening, just as she had for two years, when he had dined with her on that night every week.

"She'd even order the flowers and have the two places set just the same," moaned the girl. "Then she'd not touch the dinner and would cry all night long."

It was while Margaret was folding away some long kid gloves, gloves that seemed still to hold the shape and softness of the arms they had covered, that the telephone rang.

"Hello! Is this Miss Reeves' apartment?"

"Yes," murmured Margaret, quivering with

the horror of the unknown — of what might come.

"This is Swartz, the habit maker. Miss Reeves did not come for her fitting last week. Will she make another appointment now?"

"Miss Reeves is — very ill," she managed to say. "Some word will be sent you."

And then she sank on a chair by the 'phone. That any one should not know! It was not so much that they had not seen it in the papers, but that they should not *know*. She had no reason for not telling the man the truth, except the sheer horror of putting it into words. Would there be more incidents like that while she was here? She felt she could not stand it.

The rest of the afternoon Margaret worked feverishly, with the longing to get through, to have it over. When it grew dusk she lowered the blinds, turned on the lights, and still worked on. She sent Marie out for a sandwich, determined not to go home until late, hoping to be able to finish to-morrow.

It was while Marie was gone that the door bell rang. She had ordered some packing boxes earlier in the day, and now she went to the door thinking they had come.

Instantly in a burning flash — she knew him! It was the face in the locket. After the first blind impulse to turn and fly, she felt herself grow cold and rigidly calm.

Without a word, and with only a slight bow, he stepped into the lighted bedroom. The front room was dark — Margaret had turned on the lights only where she was working.

In one glance he swept the littered room, the trunk and packing boxes. As he stood there, his hat in his hand, the light fell full on his face and she saw that he had suffered. She saw, too, something of the force and personality of the man Katherine had loved.

He met her eyes.

"There are some letters?"

Margaret made an almost imperceptible inclination of the head.

"Perhaps it would be better —"

"For you to take them and be quite sure that all of your infamy would not be published."

But he did not seem to hear her taunt. "I thought I would ask you to burn them. I think she would rather have it so."

Again Margaret made the slightest bend of her head. His eyes now rested on the dressing

table with an expression before which Margaret instinctively looked away.

"There was a ring — and a plain band bracelet — if I could have those —"

"They are all there on the dressing table. I suppose she would want you to have anything you wish."

Then she turned abruptly and went into the front room. In the dark she leaned against the wall; her hands hung clenched by her side.

She had left him alone with Katherine's things. That is what she would have wanted. Whatever her opinion of the man might be — Katherine had loved him. She must keep that before her. But he must not press her too far, or she still might not be able to control the wild denunciation that burned so fiercely within her. She would stay where she was; perhaps he would leave without speaking to her again.

A long mirror at the end of the drawing room reflected faintly, through the open door, a part of the bedroom. A portion of the bed and chair, on which the lace negligee still lay, could be seen. Margaret kept her eyes fixed vacantly upon it. The dressing table was against the wall on the other side, and was not reflected,

but she knew he was standing before it. She pictured him touching the things, the dainty, intimate things around which so much of Katherine's personality still lingered. What memories and associations were they bringing back to him? She thought of the comb with the long shining hair. Would he see that too?

Suddenly, like an apparition, he appeared in the mirror. For a long moment he stood motionless by the bed. Then he caught up the soft lace garment and buried his face in it. The whispered "Katherine! Katherine!" was very faint — but Margaret heard it. His broad shoulders quivered in a soundless sob. When at length he let the garment drop and raised his head, for an instant the mirror reflected full his face. She knew then — that he had loved her. Whatever had been the cause of his desertion — he had loved her. After that glimpse of his face in the mirror, Margaret never again doubted that.

And then, as she had hoped he would, he passed out, closing the door softly after him. It was as though the curtain had dropped on some powerful emotional play. She had not known until now that her face was wet with

tears. She felt awed and dazed before the unfathomable power of love. Love renounced, denied, cruelly disowned, and yet in the end — unconquerable. She found herself thinking of this man with something like pity. Whatever had been his cruelty and selfishness — he was suffering now.

XV

AN UNEXPECTED TEST

AS Margaret hurried up the broad steps of the Metropolitan Museum, her thoughts went back to the day, almost two years ago, when she had met him there just such a grey misty afternoon. Many times since they had met there, but it was that day that always stood out in her memory, the day she had thought their parting was final.

How much had happened since then — through what changing phases of mind and conditions they had passed! With a weighted sadness that she could not throw off, Margaret hurried on to the gallery of ancient pottery, where they were to meet.

He was leaning against a case of Majolica vases. She saw only the side of his face, but it wore an expression she had come to know and dread, a brooding despondency that was now becoming more and more frequent. He did not see her until she touched his arm.

"I'm sorry to be so late — the cars were blocked."

"I knew it was something like that," reassuringly. "You must never worry when you're detained in some way; I shall always understand and wait."

She smiled up at him. "Do you know that in all our meetings for over two years how rarely either of us has been late?"

"Yes, I've often thought of that. You're a very punctual, faithful little person."

She pressed his arm. "And you — ah, my dear!"

They moved on to the next gallery. A row of seats was arranged in the centre of the place.

"Are you tired? Would you rather sit down a while — or shall we wander about?"

"Oh, let's wander about," she answered quickly, feeling that just now the motion of walking would be better than the conscious silence that would come between them should they sit down. For, in spite of his efforts to greet her cheerfully, she felt the weight of his depression, and there was within her no joy or lightness with which to relieve it.

How much of this increased despondency was

due to Katherine's death she could not have told. But she knew it had seared deep into both their minds. They had come to tacitly avoid any reference to the tragedy, but Margaret felt that it was always in the background, that it hung over all their thoughts. It seemed to shadow their own future with an ominous foreboding.

The galleries were now almost deserted. It was near the closing hour, and the stillness around them was broken only by the echoing of distant sounds, that muffled yet booming echo peculiar to great public buildings.

They paused now before a case of jewellery of the early Roman period, curiously wrought rings and armlets with strange carvings and inscriptions.

"The men and women who wore those things loved and suffered and fought out the little tragedy of life very much as we do now," he said musingly. "After all, it's for such a few years at most. When one looks at it in that way, it doesn't seem to matter so much whether we've been happy or unhappy. In a little while it will make no difference. To the woman who wore that small twisted bracelet there with the glowing stones, it makes no difference now — it has

made no difference for centuries — whether she was loved or unloved. And to the man who carried that dagger — of how little consequence are his victories and defeats!"

"But one so rarely thinks of it in that way. We don't ordinarily feel the insignificance of our individual life and efforts as we do here."

"No, and I suppose it's better that we don't — there would be so little incentive for any achievements if we did."

The dusk and silence lent an infinite melancholy to this realm of the past, these relics of antiquity, treasures of lost arts that had so long outlived the hands that wrought them.

A chill sense of dread, of terror, of the inevitable forces of life and death was creeping over Margaret. She wanted to cry out to him to take her away from this tomb of the ages, to give her life and love and joy and laughter! And yet she realised how little he could give her, how helpless he was to shield or protect her in any way.

It was not until a great gong struck the closing hour that either of them spoke. A guard came through, calling "All out! All out!"

How strange the street seemed after that hour

in the archives of the past. For a few moments Margaret felt that the things they had left in those gloomy galleries were more real, more a part of her own life, than this hurrying crowd, these glittering cabs and carriages with their shining lamps. The transition was too sudden from the silence and gloom of the museum to the throbbing life of this great city.

Instinctively, to avoid some of the noise and glare of the streets, they turned into the park. Again Margaret thought of that day two years ago when they had left the Museum and walked through the park, the same path they had chosen now. The same deserted seats lined the way, the same lamps glimmered here and there among the trees. Now they were walking over the same rustic bridge; the dark water reflected the lights now as it had then.

"The swans are missing," he said quietly, as he drew her to a pause by the railing, just where they had stood before.

She started. "Were you —"

He nodded.

They walked on in silence — the brooding silence that had of late become so large a part of all their wanderings. With sick foreboding

Margaret realised how little they had to say to each other now. They were both so tired of these aimless, homeless wanderings. The charm they had for them in the beginning had long since worn away. And yet, as he had said bitterly a few days before, they had only the streets and restaurants. And when Margaret had cried out futilely as she had so many times before, would it always be like this — would they never have a home — he could only give her the same hopeless answer — that he did not know — they must try to wait.

The path had finally led them out of the park, and now they were walking along a rather dark and dreary side street. Their usual endings to walks like this, particularly on a cold or damp day, was a half hour in some café with a glass of wine or cognac. But lately he seemed rather to avoid this. Margaret vaguely felt the reason — that he did not wish to take her so often to such places. But now she was chilled through, with both the cold and the depression of her thoughts.

"Oh, do take me somewhere where it's warm and light — I'm so cold and tired!"

Instantly he aroused himself. "Poor little girl, how thoughtless I've been! We should have

taken a cab when we came out of the park. Where shall we go? I don't know any place around here."

"Isn't that a café down the street — on the other side?"

"That doesn't look very attractive. I don't much like to take you to such places."

"It doesn't matter — any place will do for a few moments. We won't have time to go anywhere else."

He made no further protest and they crossed the street. It was a small German rathskeller. A piano and a strident violin were clashing loudly some popular tune. The air was heavy with smoke. Although it was early, a number of the small tables were already filled. A passing waiter, with some empty beer glasses in one hand and a soiled towel in the other, paused for their order.

Margaret asked for a glass of cognac. She knew he would rather she would have sherry or any light wine, but she wanted something to give her warmth, to drive some of the chill depression from her thoughts.

She felt his repugnance to the place, and his greater repugnance to her own careless indiffer-

ence to it all. He was moodily toying with the match stand that stood on the table between them.

"Why did you insist on me bringing you here? You know I don't like to see you in places like this."

"Why?"

"You know why. You must see the character of the place and of the women who come here."

"And do you think I'll be permanently contaminated by a few moments of this atmosphere?" bitterly.

He pushed back the match safe impatiently.

Margaret reached her hand across the table toward him.

"Don't you see — it isn't altogether the place? It's because we're both so tired of this homeless wandering — of having nothing but the streets and restaurants and cafés. Oh, if you could only come freely to my apartment — instead of always having to roam around like this."

"We've tried that over and over again — and it always ends disastrously. She always finds out, and then it takes days to pacify her. Just now she's more content than she's been for some time, because she thinks I'm not seeing you at

all. And I must have peace at home, if I'm to be able to do my work at all."

"You always hold that over me — your work."

"I must, dear," more gently. "Can't you see we could have no future if my practice goes to pieces? And it nearly has. A practice that took me fifteen years to build up, almost ruined because of my neglect in the two years I've known you."

"Oh, don't say that — how can you blame me — how —"

"I'm not blaming you, Margaret, I'm only trying to show you how fatal it would be if I should come to see you with any regularity again. I can risk it occasionally, but if it should be often, she would be certain to learn of it, and there would be more scenes and more sleepless nights — more days that I'd be utterly unfit for work. As it is, I've sleepless nights enough."

"But I thought you said she was content now."

"She is, but don't you think I'm worried about you — about your future? Don't you know I see what a strain all of this is on your health — how depressed and hopeless you've become?

Don't you believe I'm always trying to find some solution?"

"You *do* see that?" She leaned forward eagerly. "You *do* realise how it is breaking me down — how thin and worn I look? Somehow I've thought you *didn't* see —"

"Of course I do, dear." He covered the hand which lay on the table with his own. "But I thought it best not to talk about it, that it might only make you worse, that you might try to force things — to use my sympathy to bring about some crisis which I feel now would be fatal for us all."

"Oh, no — no, I wouldn't — it would help me! It's because I sometimes feel that you've become so blind and indifferent to my health that it makes me almost desperate."

"I could never be indifferent to your health, Margaret; you ought to know that. But I'm always hoping that I can do something. I'd always so much rather act than talk."

"And you know it isn't really my health. I mean it's only the result of all this strain, that if we could be together always, I'd be perfectly well and happy. You *know* that — don't you?"

She felt the warmth of his hand as it closed more closely over hers. "Yes, dear, I do."

Her eyes dropped and a faint flush came to her cheeks. A large grey cat, with a leather collar, that had been roaming leisurely around among the tables, now jumped up on a chair beside Margaret. She stooped over to pet it, glad of a chance to hide the colour in her face. It rubbed against her and purred exuberantly.

Suddenly she looked up, her eyes aglow.

"I wonder if you know how much more I love all things, particularly children and animals, since we met?"

"I believe I ought to know." He smiled at her tenderly. "You've told me several times."

"Oh, how unkind — have I said that before? I suppose I have, but I'll never —"

"Yes, you will — you must say it many times more. Those are the things I love to hear."

It was a lighter, happier mood than they had been in for many days. They left the café with a feeling of weariness that made them unmindful of the chill air and dreary street.

"Shall we take this car? It goes almost to my door," she suggested quickly.

Margaret always kept him from calling a cab

when possible; from the very beginning she had had an instinctive reluctance to his spending much money on her. Often her little subterfuges to keep down the expense of their outings would both hurt and offend him.

The car was crowded, but he found a seat for her and clung to a strap beside her. Now and then, as the car lurched, he would be swayed against her, and she was conscious of a thrill that always came when he was very near.

When they left the car at her corner, he glanced at his watch.

"It's only a few moments after six. If I get home for dinner by seven, it will be all right — so we can still have almost an hour more. Shall we walk up around the square?"

Eagerly she assented. Her heart leaped at his evident reluctance to leave her; it was like it had been in those wonderful first months.

She pressed against his arm. "After all, dear, we do have some very happy moments still."

"Still? Why do you say that?" he asked quickly.

"Ah, you know it hasn't been the same lately."

"It's only because we've been so worried — there have been so many things . . . But if we

can only help each other to be patient — it may mean a greater and more permanent happiness than we've ever had."

They walked on for several moments in silence, but it was a contented silence, not the brooding abyss that was so often between them.

Suddenly she felt him start. He stepped back.

"That is Mrs. Whitman," in a tense voice. "You must excuse me!" He lifted his hat, and the next moment was hurrying across the street.

For a moment she stood perfectly still where he had left her. Then she walked straight ahead, seeing nothing, her eyes on the ground, her cheeks ablaze.

That he should have left her! Left her alone in the street — after dark — to go to *her!* That he should have subjected her to this!

There was a quick step behind her — his hand was on her arm.

"What can I say? I shouldn't have left you — I see that now. But I had no time to think. My first impulse was to go to her. I thought she had not seen us, and that I might prevent it. I know now that I should have stayed with you."

"Then you left her?" tensely.

"It wasn't she — I was mistaken."

"Oh — oh," with a hysterical laugh. "So that is why you came back to me! It took great courage to do that!"

He made no answer.

"If it *had* been she — and she had seen us — and you had gone as you said — before you had time to think — would you have come back then? Would you let *her* see that you were leaving her for me — as I saw you were leaving me for her?"

He was silent.

"*Would* you?"

"I don't know," in a low voice.

"You don't know?"

"I told you, Margaret, that had I had time to think — I wouldn't have left you. But having gone to her — I don't think I could have come back to you."

"Why?"

"Because it would have been far more of a deliberate insult to her to come back to you than it would have been to have remained with you. You must see that would have been an intolerable thing!"

She knew he was right, and yet, so fierce had been her indignation, that now the desire to make

him say something that would soothe her hurt pride was very strong.

"Don't try to force me to say anything I cannot mean, Margaret — that can never help. I'm unspeakably sorry this happened — that I left you in that way. There is little enough I can do for you without subjecting you to any humiliation. It's a pitiable thing to wound the pride of the woman one loves, and I'm willing to say or do anything I can to make amends — anything that will be true."

She was still struggling with herself, with a jealous indignation that still welled in her throat.

"Listen, Margaret, I'll do this. There are going to be guests at the house for dinner tonight, and of course I should be there. But I'll give it up — I'll take you out to dinner instead."

With one of the quick impulses of her nature all the bitterness vanished now.

"No — no, I wouldn't want you to disappoint your guests. I'm not quite so childish and selfish as that! I know many times I must have seemed so, or you wouldn't think such a sacrifice would appease me now. But I'm not going to be like that any more — oh, I'm not — I'm not —" There were tears in her voice and eyes.

"You must hurry now, or you'll be late for your dinner. And you mustn't worry about this; I'll try not to think of it any more."

It was the best of her love that was uppermost now.

"You mean that, dear? You'll be content to have me go? You'll not brood over this and become hurt and bitter again when you're alone?"

"No — no, I promise that I won't. Only —" She hesitated with a pitiful little laugh that seemed to beg tolerance for her weakness. "If — if —"

"If what, dear? Let me do anything I can."

"Oh, I know I shouldn't ask you — but I *do* want you to say that if we ever should meet her on the street — that you'd never leave me like that again."

"I can say that with all sincerity. I hope it may never happen, but in our constant wanderings there's always a possibility that it may. If it does, whatever the consequences — I will stay by your side."

As he hurried home, more than ever he realised how much of the child there was in her nature. In spite of all the unhappiness that he knew this very trait had caused them, it was one

of the things that most endeared her to him. And now his thoughts went back to her with more than usual tenderness.

The incident of leaving her on the street had filled him with keen distress. He had a sense of having failed her in a crisis, of having been put to a test and found wanting.

He remembered she had once said, "If it ever comes to any real crisis — *I'll* be the one you will fail — not she." All through the dinner his mind dwelt on that.

XVI

THE TRIP TO THE COUNTRY

MARGARET sprang from her bed in the fear and bewilderment of a sudden awakening. As she hurried across the room, her glance fell on the clock — it was only seven! What did it mean? Who could be telephoning so early?

Then she recognised the voice, but knew by the tone, that nothing had happened.

"I hope I haven't startled you — but I wondered if you would like to take a trip in the country to-day."

"A trip in the country?"

"Yes, I'm going out to Fair View to drive Prince in. Would you care to go with me? You've been out so little lately, I thought this trip might do you good."

"Oh, I'd love to go — you know that!"

"Can you get down to the Grand Central in time for a 7:55 train?"

"Yes, yes — I think I can. I'll try."

"Then take the subway. It will be quicker than a cab. I'll be there to meet you."

Only fifty-five minutes! Could she make it?

She dressed with breathless haste, filled with delight at the prospect of the day with him, of the long drive back through the country. It was just half past when she left her apartment. Only twenty-five minutes more — and the subway was two blocks over.

Fortunately she did not have to wait for a train; one dashed in as she ran down the steps. The car was crowded with early morning workers. At the Grand Central Station she saw him before the gates were open. Her heart leaped as it always did when she met him, and the thought came to her — how often she had seen him like that, how many trips they had had together, how rich were the memories of their wanderings. And now, to-day, another trip lay before them, another day full of new experiences, new possibilities for happiness.

"Am I in time?" eagerly.

"In good time," he assured her. "We've six minutes yet."

He hurried her up through the station and out to the waiting train.

"I'm afraid there are no chair cars; will you mind an ordinary coach?"

She laughed happily and pressed against his arm. "As if I'd mind anything while I'm with you. Oh, I'm very, *very* happy this morning!"

"Then you didn't object to my calling you up so early?" in the tone of one who knows the answer but wants to hear it in words.

"Object?" For a swift second she brushed her cheek against his arm.

He bent over her. "Margaret, dear little Margaret!" It was the tone and phrase that always thrilled her.

They had just reached their train as it was moving out. With a quick strong movement he swung her up on the steps. She flung him a laughing tender glance.

The city and its shabby outskirts were soon left behind, and they were whirling through woods and fields. There was a note of joyousness in the crisp morning air and vivid sunshine. He had opened the window beside them and the fresh earthy odour of the country blew against their faces.

"It's going to be a wonderful day — think, dear, a whole day together! After all, it *is* a beautiful world to give us this!"

"Do you still think that, Margaret?" he asked tenderly. "That is what you used to say, but lately we've had so much unhappiness — I've been afraid —"

"Oh, I know, and yet if one can have moments like this — surely it compensates."

"If I could only feel you would always think that."

For a while they were silent. Both felt that the other's mind was teeming with thoughts, thoughts that involved all the questions of their future, a future that stretched before them baffling, impregnable — hopeless.

To interrupt these thoughts that could only depress them, he told her how he happened to get away to-day. Two cases that had been set for this morning were withdrawn yesterday afternoon, which left the day practically free. She repressed the desire to ask why he had not telephoned her last night, why he had waited until this morning. But he divined her thought. After a short hesitation, he said, with evident reluctance,

"Mrs. Whitman has been saying all Fall that when I drove Prince in for the winter she wanted to go with him. And I didn't know until this morning that she — wouldn't go."

"Wouldn't go?" She knew, whatever the circumstances, that she had no real cause for the jealous resentment that was rising within her.

"Wouldn't go?" she repeated, his silence increasing her resentment.

"She said this morning that she did not wish to go."

"And then you asked me?" bitterly.

He turned to her. "You told me once, Margaret, that you would have no feeling about conditions of this kind, that you wanted me to take advantage of every opportunity to be with you, however it came about."

"I know — I know I did."

There was another silence. He leaned forward and raised the shade a little higher, then he said quietly:

"The trees are unusually brilliant this year. I don't remember any Fall when they were so vividly coloured."

"*Why did she not want to go?*"

"Because we had some words last night."

"Some words?"

"Margaret, are you going to insist that we talk about that now? Do you want to spoil this day?"

In the hurry and excitement of their meeting, she had not noticed the wearied lines in his face, but she saw them now. They were lines she had learned came only from a sleepless, wretched night.

"You didn't sleep last night?"

He made no answer.

"*She* didn't let you sleep?" bitterly.

Still no answer.

"Then why did you take this trip to-day?"

"Because it was a chance to be with you. I thought the outing might do us both good. But it won't if you insist upon talking about . . ." He finished the sentence with a gesture of despair.

The weariness in his face and voice awoke in her a thrill of pity.

"No — no, I won't, I promise. We'll forget everything but that we're together for a whole day."

A train boy came through with chewing gum and chocolates.

He turned to her with sudden anxiety. "You've had no breakfast?"

She smiled. "Have you?"

"It doesn't matter about me, but I've been very thoughtless of you. And of course there's no dining car on here." He called the boy back. "Have you any oranges? Fruit of any kind?"

"No, sir."

"Can't you get some at the next stop?"

"No, sir — not till we get to Parkstown."

"I'm sorry, dear," turning back to her as the boy had passed on. "But I tell you how we'll manage it. . . ."

She nestled closer; she always loved to hear him say — "Now I tell you what we'll do," or "Now I'll arrange it so we can . . ." It always gave her the feeling she so craved of being looked after, of being taken care of.

"Fairville, the railway station, is just five miles this side of the farm. I'll have to get some kind of a vehicle there, and drive over after Prince. I'll take you to the hotel there and you can have breakfast while I'm gone."

"Then you won't have any breakfast at all?"

"I'm afraid I won't have time. If I stop for breakfast, it'll make us late." He took out his

watch. "We'll be at Fairville about half past nine. It'll take me over an hour to drive to the farm and back; that will make it nearly eleven. Then we've forty miles back to New York, part of it's a bad road, and we want to get it before dark if possible."

"Then I'll not stop for breakfast either — I'd much rather go with you. I've always wanted to see your farm — the rustic seat you made yourself, and the little summer house by the creek where you wrote me so many letters."

He hesitated. "But I'm afraid you couldn't see those things."

"Couldn't see them?"

"I couldn't drive you up to the house. I'd have to leave you in the vehicle somewhere down the road. The caretaker and his wife are there, and if a strange woman should come with me they'd be sure to mention it to — to Mrs. Whitman."

Margaret made no answer, but the old fierce jealousy and bitterness rose in her throat. She was looking steadily out the window at a stretch of ragged cornfields. It was always so — always *she* must be thought of! They could never

have a day — not even an hour together — but that they must think of *her!*

He covered her hand with his own. "I know, dear — I know what you're thinking. But I'm afraid it can't be helped."

"Very well, then. I'll wait at Fairville."

"Ardsdale!" shouted the guard.

"It's just two more stations now, dear."

A few moments later they stepped from the car to the platform of a straggling little village. Directly across from the station was a three-story, shabby frame building with a large sign: "*Palace Hotel.*"

"This is the only place here," as he took her across the street. "I'm afraid you can't get much of a breakfast, but you must try to eat something."

"And you won't wait for even a cup of coffee?"

"I think I'd better not. The livery stable is just around the corner. I'll get a man and a rig there, and try to be back in an hour. We can have an early luncheon on the way. There're a number of good road-houses between here and New York."

Left alone in the dingy country hotel, Margaret felt strangely desolate. The close, musty smell of the dining room, the soiled table cloths and the smeary catsup bottles banished any appetite she might have had. She ordered only coffee and rolls. The coffee was brought her in a thick cracked cup, with a small pitcher of bluish milk.

Why not spend this hour in fixing up a lunch — a lunch they could eat on the way? It would save time; they need not stop at a road-house unless they wished. She welcomed the idea with enthusiasm. It would give a picnic atmosphere to their trip, and how surprised he would be!

In a few moments she was exploring the main street of the village. There were no delicatessens, but there were a number of small grocery and bake-shops. In the cleanest of the bakeries was a capable-looking woman who, under Margaret's direction, made a number of sandwiches and packed them in a large paper box. Sardines, olives, crackers, cheese and fruit from a near-by grocer, filled the box.

Then she saw him coming — far down the street. Prince was fairly dancing over the rough

cobble stones. As he drew up, she noticed that his face was slightly flushed.

He sprang out, hitched the horse and took the box from her.

"What's this? Our lunch?" joyfully.

She nodded. "How did you know?"

"I'd hardly left before I thought of how much time we could save if we had a lunch put up at the hotel."

She laughed. "This is much nicer than anything they could put up at that hotel. I did it myself — got the things at a grocery and a bake shop."

"It'll seem like a picnic," boyishly.

"That's what I thought. But we haven't anything to drink. Can't we get a bottle of mineral water?"

"I'm afraid not here. But perhaps we can get some wine at the hotel; they have a small bar there. Let me put you in the trap first, and then I'll see what is to be had."

To Margaret, in her eagerness to be off, it seemed a long time before he returned with a bottle and a couple of glasses wrapped in newspaper.

"It's a cheap California claret — but it's all they had."

He put the bottle in the bottom of the trap with the lunch box, and sprang in beside her. Prince knew his touch on the reins and dashed off with a purr of delight. They were soon out on the broad country road. He leaned over and tucked the lap robe about her.

"Are you warm and comfortable, dear? We've a long drive before us."

Again she noticed that his face seemed strangely flushed and his hand trembled as he arranged the robe.

"Graham, you're not well?" anxiously.

"Not well? What makes you think that?"

"Why — you seem so flushed — you're not feverish?"

"I've a headache — that's all."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. It's because you had no sleep last night and nothing to eat this morning. Let me get you a sandwich now." She stooped over for the box.

"No — no, not now," almost irritably. "Wait 'till we get out a little farther. Prince is too restless to stand now."

The trap lurched heavily as a sharp turn kept

them from sliding down a deep gulch at the side of the road. A moment later they grazed the wheel of a heavy farm wagon. As Margaret instinctively turned, she saw the man looking back in angry astonishment. Then she realised how recklessly he was driving. When they whirled over a narrow railless bridge, escaping the edge by barely an inch, she caught his arm with a little cry. Just ahead was a forked road. The horse plunged on, seemingly without guidance, to the left. Margaret saw that the road was a private one and led up the hill to a large house half hid among the trees.

Without a word he turned Prince sharply around, the wheels grating fiercely against the side of the trap.

"Graham, do you mean that you didn't know this road — that you left it to the horse?"

"Why not? Does it matter where we go as long as we're together?"

As she looked up in startled alarm, he drew her to him and kissed her.

And then — she *knew!*

She shrank back, covering her face with her hands. "Oh, Graham, what made you do it?"

"What made me kiss you? Why, sweetheart, I didn't know you'd mind."

Her heart sickened at the cheap evasion and the forced playfulness of his voice.

"Oh, you know I don't mean that — you know what I mean! Oh, how could you — how *could* you?"

He did not answer, but she saw that he was frowning darkly. They were now at the cross roads again. With a jerk he turned the horse back over the road they had first come.

"Graham — Graham, where *are you going* — this is the way we came!"

Again he jerked the horse around, this time almost overturning the trap.

"You're hard to please this morning," with an unpleasant laugh.

"Oh, how'll we ever get to New York — how'll we ever get there?" She was almost sobbing now.

The horse, impatient at the many turnings, was tearing along at a dangerous pace. She saw that his hold on the reins was far from steady. The effect of the liquor was increasing! How much had he drunk? How long would it last? Would he be able to manage the horse? She was

thoroughly terrified now. But worse than her terror was the hideous realisation that he should have done this thing — that to-day of all days he should have had so little self-control. He had stopped somewhere on his way for Prince; she recalled now his flushed face and the length of time it had taken him to get the wine. Her own face burned hotly with anger and indignation.

The trap was swinging perilously near a deep ditch by the side of the road, and just ahead was another narrow bridge.

"Graham, let me drive for a little while — won't you?" tremulously.

"Why?" curtly.

"Why, because — I like to drive — and it will rest you."

"I'm not tired."

They dashed across the bridge and on with increasing speed.

If she could get him to eat something — that might help. The very fact of his having eaten nothing since yesterday may have made him more susceptible to the liquor. She took the lunch box up on her lap and opened it with trembling fingers. She folded back the paper and took out a sandwich.

"Graham, won't you try to eat something?" appealingly.

He shook his head.

"You've had nothing to eat this morning? Nothing while you were gone for Prince?"

"No."

"Then you must have something now."

"Don't want anything to eat. I'll take a glass of that wine." His voice had grown thicker.

"Oh, no — you mustn't have that now."

"Why not?" angrily.

She saw her mistake. "Why — only because I thought you ought to eat something first."

"Where's that wine?"

She did not answer; the hot angry tears were in her eyes and throat. The horse, of its own accord, had slowed down now. Holding the reins in one hand, he stooped over for the wine and glasses. She saw him pour it out.

"Graham — don't — don't — please don't drink that now!" She caught his arm, causing a little of the wine to spill over on his glove.

"Look out there — what are you doing!" harshly.

It was the last blow to her quivering self-

control; she covered her face with her hands and sobbed hysterically. The lunch box slid unheeded from her lap, its contents overturned at their feet. With a smothered oath he hurled the glass out into the road.

"Are you satisfied now? I didn't touch it!"

But the fierce anger in his voice only made her sobs more violent. With another oath he picked up the bottle and sent it crashing against a rock. The horse reared and sprang forward in nervous fear.

White with rage, and making no effort to check the horse, he jerked up the lunch box and flung it out. A bottle of olives and some sandwiches still lay where they had fallen when the box slid from her lap. He gathered these up and hurled them all into the road.

Margaret was staring at him now with wide, terror-stricken eyes. He did not once look toward her; he was gazing straight in front of him and she could see only the side of his white, set face.

The horse, now thoroughly frightened, was plunging ahead, the trap swaying sickeningly from side to side. To Margaret it seemed that every second they would be dashed out. Then

it came to her that this might be the solution of everything — death together in this way. And for the moment there was in her heart no sense of fear, no desire to evade any end for which they might be destined; there was more a feeling of fatalism, of freedom from responsibility, of waiting quietly for the inevitable.

A long clear stretch of road lay before them; there were no teams in sight. And gradually the horse wore itself out — its speed became less and less. Margaret relaxed her hold on the seat and leaned back with a sense almost of disappointment that it had not come. To go on seemed harder just then than a merciful oblivion.

They were driving now in absolute silence. Again they came to a cross road. She saw him hesitate and then choose the one to the right. Instinctively she felt that he did not know the road — that he had chosen at hazard. A few moments before she had looked forward calmly to death, but, now that the danger was passed, all her indignation and horror at the situation flamed up again. Her anxiety about the road finally conquered her aversion to speak.

"Is this the right road? Do you know?" Her voice carried all the scorn and anger that

she felt. She had recklessly thrown aside all desire to conciliate him now.

"*Is this the right road?*" She repeated it again.

"It may be."

"Will you ask the next person we meet?"

Silence.

"*Will you?*"

Still silence.

Margaret caught her breath; her face burned crimson. A bend in the road brought them in sight of a man leading a couple of horses. Would he ask this man or would he deliberately ignore her request? Unconsciously she leaned forward, tense, expectant.

And then — *he drove by without a glance toward the man.* The red in her cheeks flamed deeper. She clenched her hands in her effort to keep back the bitter, reckless words. A half mile farther on and a man driving a spring wagon came briskly toward them.

"Will you ask this man, or shall I?" tensely.

His answer was to lean forward, take the whip from the socket and cut it sharply in the air. Prince bounded forward, passing the man in a flash. Margaret sprang to her feet, her hand

on the dashboard. In another second she would have jumped from the trap.

"What are you doing?" He caught her arm savagely and forced her back into the seat.

"I'm going to get out — I'll find my way back to New York alone."

"You'll stay where you are!"

He kept his hand on her arm with a fierce grasp. She was sobbing convulsively now, in her helpless efforts to struggle away from him.

If he had admitted his condition, if he had been penitent and remorseful, her indignation would have been tempered with pity. But this sullen defiance aroused all her reckless, bitter antagonism. That he should have brought her out for a day's pleasure and then subjected her to this! With an almost childish enragement she thought of the lunch she had so carefully prepared and how he had hurled it into the road.

Again she struggled to free her arm and again his hold tightened painfully.

"Oh, I hate you — I *hate* you! You're drunk — *drunk!*"

His only reply was a harsh laugh and a still more cruel hold on her arm. She had thrown aside all caution now, her only thought was to

spring from the trap — to get away from him.

A road roller and a number of workmen loomed in sight ahead of them. By the machine was a man on horseback, evidently a foreman. When they neared the puffing engine Prince stopped suddenly and began to back.

As he released her arm to manage the horse, she sprang recklessly to the ground. In an instant she was on her feet to show him that she was unhurt. The fear of his springing after her and being injured had occurred to her as she jumped.

Two of the road hands, thinking she had jumped through fright, came running up to hold the horse.

"It's all right now, Miss; you can get back in. We'll lead him by the engine."

What could she say?

"No — no, I — I'm not going that way."

Then she turned and almost ran down the road without a backward glance. She was vaguely conscious of her disarranged hair and flushed tear-stained face. If she could get off the road — into the woods — away from the wondering eyes that she felt were following her. But on both sides the road was fenced in by a

high rail fence. They had passed an open woods — was it much farther back? If she could only reach it!

Then came the sound of wheels close behind. He was following her. Drawing farther away from the road and nearer the fence, she hurried on without turning her head. The wheels were quite near now — now they were beside her.

"Will you get in before any publicity comes from this? The man on horseback is following us. He knows you didn't jump through fear. He thinks something is wrong."

Margaret knew by his voice that the incident had sobered him; it was perfectly clear and steady, but it was hard and cold as steel. He stopped the trap close beside her.

"I'll not get in!" passionately.

"*You must!* When we pass this man I'll let you out — if you insist."

"You mean that? You'll let me out whenever I ask you — as soon as we've passed this man?"

"Yes."

"You give me your word?"

"Yes."

She moved toward the trap. Without waiting to be helped, she stepped in and drew the lap

robe over her. He turned Prince sharply around, and again they drove off in silence. The man on horseback and the road hands were soon met and left far behind.

Now that he was almost himself again, if he had at that moment drawn her to him and expressed his regret for it all; if he had been sufficiently humble and penitent — the day might still have been saved. She was waiting for him to make some amends — but his cold silence only the more bitterly incensed her. Did he think she had weakened — that she did not have the courage of her threat?

"I'll get out here."

It was as though he had not heard her.

"You gave me your word!" tensely.

"Very well," curtly. He stopped the horse.

The next moment she was making her way along a narrow path that led from the road through an open woods.

There was no sound of wheels. He had not driven on; he was still standing there. Then she heard his voice — he was calling something to her. But she could not hear the words — and she did not turn.

He would come after her! He would hitch

the horse and come after her. He would be full of contrition now! When the trees and brush hid her from the road, she turned and listened tensely. In a moment she would hear his step rustling through the leaves! But the stillness was absolute.

Then came the faint sound of wheels. He had driven on! He had taken her at her word and left her there!

She stumbled a few steps deeper into the woods and threw herself on a bed of leaves. She would lie there until he came for her! She would lie there until he came. Blindly, passionately she said it over and over again to herself.

It was some time before she realised that her head was resting on the bare root of a tree, and the rough bark was pressing cruelly into her cheek. She moved slightly and her head lay in the leaves. The odour of the earth came up fresh and pungent. But the ground was cold and damp — she felt the chill of it through her body.

Gradually the fierce anger died out of her heart, and in its place came a fearful sense of her desolation. The leaf-stirred stillness of the

woods seemed filled with a shuddering pause, a hushed expectance of some lurking horror.

If he should not come! What had he called to her as she entered the woods? Why had she not stopped and listened? Again and again she recalled the sound of his voice and tried in vain to fit it to words.

A quick rustle of the leaves near by! She started up, her heart aleap. It was only a squirrel gazing at her with bright startled eyes as it whisked up a tree trunk.

She sank back in quivering disappointment, burying her face in her arm to shut out the sight of the woods. There was something vaguely comforting in the familiar warmth and feel of her cloth sleeve as it pressed against her eyes, and in the blurred blackness that wavered beneath her closed lids.

Then came a distant sound of snapping twigs and trampled brush that was unmistakable. Again she sprang up. Far to the right was a glimpse of his grey overcoat disappearing amongst the trees. He had not seen her — he was going away from her! To call out to him now would mean a pitiful confession of her weakness — her lack of courage. No — he must

find her! Her indignation was still strong within her. She hurried on in the direction he had disappeared, hoping he would hear her and turn. At length the fear of being lost forced her to pause.

The silence now seemed even more sinister than before. Once more she sank down by the trunk of a tree. The shadows deepened around her. She could no longer cling to the hope of his coming back. He had made only a perfunctory effort to find her. The encroaching darkness now filled her with terror. She must go back to the road and make her way to the nearest railway station. It was growing colder; a raw wind had risen from the east. She was shivering with the cold.

With difficulty she found the road again. As she came out upon it there was a distant sound of wheels. Nearer and nearer they came — was it too heavy for a trap — was it . . . It was only a farmer's wagon!

She choked back the sob in her throat and turned down the road. Why had she not asked the farmer to take her to the nearest station? She dragged herself on, but met no one else; there was not even a farmhouse from which she

could ask the way. The long stretch of wooded road seemed endless.

And then as she reached the top of a slight hill — there before her was a bay horse and a red-wheeled trap! A bay horse and a red-wheeled trap — it seemed to fill the whole horizon, to stand out before her, to stamp itself on her brain as nothing had ever done before.

But the trap was empty — it was hitched to a tree near the fence. For an instant a great fear chilled her heart. And then she saw him coming out from the woods. His face was white and set. Instinctively she shrank back.

He saw her then. For a moment he stood quite still. She did not move to meet him; her limbs seemed incapable of movement. The flash of joy that crossed his face changed and hardened as he came toward her. She was strangely conscious of the awkwardness of their position as they stood facing each other there in the road.

"Did you do this to frighten me, Margaret? Was that your plan?" His voice was curiously quiet. When she did not answer, he added still more quietly,

"I hope you didn't do it for that purpose — it

would be very hard to forgive you if you did."

Hard to forgive — to forgive *her!* She caught her breath.

"Shall I put you in now?"

She submitted dumbly while he put her in the trap. Once more he turned Prince down the road.

"You're shivering? Are you cold?"

She nodded.

He took an extra robe from under the seat and wrapped it about her. But there was no warmth or tenderness in his manner; only a formal courtesy. As he arranged the rug, accidentally he touched her hand. Even through the glove it was icy cold. Then he noticed the purplish pallor of her lips.

"You're chilled through. Where were you?" His voice was still colourless but there was something in it now that forced an answer.

"In the woods."

"I've been searching the woods for two hours, but of course if you tried to hide — it would be impossible to find you."

"I didn't try to hide. You passed very near — but —"

She felt her mistake, but it was too late to retract it now. And at that moment she did not care — she had reached the stage where nothing made any difference.

"Then you saw me?" He repeated it.

"Yes."

"And you made no sign?"

"That was at first — if you had come back . . ."

"So I was right. You wanted to thoroughly frighten me — to be sure I would be humble, cringing and remorseful. You've used similar methods before. I'll not be so easily fooled again."

She made no reply. Physically and mentally she was incapable of further effort. The prolonged strain, the whole day without food were now having their effect. She was staring down at the wheels, watching the small clots of earth fly from the spokes, miserably conscious that he was looking at her. Her head drooped — his gaze seemed bearing upon her like a physical weight. Was his anger changing to pity? Still her eyes were fixed on the whirling wheels.

"I'm afraid you're very cold and tired. We'll stop at the first road-house; we must come to one

soon. Bradford cannot be very much farther now."

But his solicitude was forced, perfunctory.

A shabby farm house stood by the road a short way ahead. He drew up by the fence and called to a man who was chopping wood in the yard.

"How far is Bradford from here?"

"Bradford? Why you're goin' right away from Bradford. It's about eighteen miles down the road."

"Eighteen miles down the road?"

"Yissir. Where'd you start from?"

"From Fairville."

"Fairville! Then you've been on the wrong road for about twelve miles. Must have taken the wrong turn at the first cross roads this side of Fairville!"

The first cross roads this side of Fairville! It was there she had begged him to inquire the way. But now she did not glance up or seem as though she had heard.

The man came down to the gate. "Now I guess you can make that about thirteen miles if you go back by way of Camp Creek — it's a bad road but it's five miles saved that way. You can let the bars down and cross thro' that

meadow over there and get on the Camp Creek road."

"Thank you, but the lady is not strong enough to drive any further now. Is there a road house near here?"

"Yessir. There's a pretty good road house just about half o' mile straight ahead."

He thanked the man and drove on. He made no comment on the information; he did not speak again until they reached the road house.

It was a faded white house with a wide porch. A discoloured sign, "Parker's Inn," hung over the gate. A small dog ran out and barked at them excitedly. Then a man in his shirt sleeves came from around the back of the house. He held the horse while Whitman lifted Margaret from the trap.

"We've been driving some time and the lady is thoroughly chilled. Have you a place with a good fire, and something hot to drink at once?"

"Yes sir, we can fix you up, sir."

The man hitched the horse and led the way into the house. He opened the door into a small low-ceilinged room, evidently the "parlour" from the organ and marble-topped table. Back of this was the dining room, with a long table

and two small ones, all covered with red checked cloths. Both rooms were cold and damp.

"It's too cold in here — you've no fires?"

"We'll build one right away, sir." There was a small drum stove in both rooms.

"That'll take some time. Have you no fire in the house?"

"Well, sir, there's one in the bar room — if you wouldn't mind goin' in there for a few minutes."

The bar room was across the hall; a long room with a bar at one end, and at the other, a large fireplace with a smouldering log fire. A couple of men who were standing by the door, stepped out on the porch as they entered.

The man threw some more logs on the fire while Whitman drew up a large wooden rocker for Margaret. She was still blue and shivering with cold.

"Now if you'll bring a hot scotch —"

"Hot scotch? Yes, sir — for two?"

There was a pause. Margaret's clasp tightened on the arm of her chair. Then he answered quietly:

"No — just for the lady."

The small dog that had barked at them so

fiercely, came in now, sniffed at Margaret's skirt and curled up on the hearth at her feet. The thump of its tail on the floor and the crackling of the logs were the only sounds for several moments. Then the man came over with the steaming drink. Whitman took the glass and placed it on the arm of her chair. Margaret sipped at it reluctantly; the odour of whiskey had always been distasteful.

"Don't sip it. Drink it all at once if you can. It'll keep you from taking cold."

Then he turned to the man who seemed to be both proprietor and barkeeper, and asked if they could have something to eat at once.

"Supper will be ready right away, sir. And will I put up your horse, sir? I reckon you count on staying all night? Your wife don't look fit to travel much further."

The pause was only for a second. "We've not decided about the night, but the horse will have to be put up and fed."

"Your wife" . . . The word seemed still to hang on the air. Had it thrilled or repelled him? She felt the possibilities both ways. They were alone now. From outside came the grating of wheels as Prince was unhitched and led off to the

stable. And then — silence — except for the crackling fire.

He came over and took the empty glass from her and set it on the mantel. Then he stood there looking down into the fire.

The heat was now burning her knees through her skirt, but she did not move back. She vaguely felt that the slightest movement on her part would change the situation that waited tensely for him to speak.

At length he came over to the chair beside her. "Are you warmer now?" He took one of her hands. "Your hands are much warmer."

A sick disappointment possessed her; she had hoped for something so different. He still held her hand, with a slight pressure, in both of his. But she did not return the pressure. He must come farther — he must do more! She could not meet him half way — the fault had not been hers. Again the lump came in her throat. Again she saw him hurling the lunch into the road — the lunch she had so lovingly prepared! The sting of it all came back to her.

All the child in her nature was uppermost now. She had been hurt, deeply, cruelly hurt. The least he could do was to make some expression of

his remorse — and instead he wished merely to ignore it.

He dropped her hand and walked back to the fire. The heat on her knees was becoming unbearable. She moved back a little. A log had rolled out on the hearth. She watched him push it in with his foot. Then she watched the glowing cinders where the log had lain; one by one they went out.

A stout kindly looking woman in a blue calico dress opened the door.

"There's a fire in the dinin' room, now, if the lady would like to come in there. I'm puttin' your supper on the table."

The dining room was lit by a couple of oil lamps. From a window one saw that it was quite dark outside. A fire roared in the small drum stove and the air was filled with an odour of heat and stove polish.

The long table was set for a number of people; the woman placed them at the end by the stove. With a painful self-consciousness Margaret sipped at the glass of water in front of her. There was a poignant awkwardness in sitting there beside him in that way. He was toying with the fork by his plate.

"Where's that tea-strainer?" came a voice from the kitchen.

"Right there on the end of the cupboard."

And then, a little later:

"Guess I'll take this milk back in the cellar — if you ain't goin' to use it in the rice."

He turned to Margaret with a slight smile. "If you're not too tired to take notes, this ought to make very good copy."

"Yes, it would make good copy." Her voice was as colourless as his.

In spite of the long day without food, neither of them could eat very much. The constrained silence was like a wall between them. He made a few remarks about the room and food to which she answered in monosyllables. The thought of what would happen next was beating in her mind. What would be the rest of this day? It was dark, now — how could they go on? And yet, how could they stay here?

The strangeness of the place and of their being there was forcing itself upon her. Every detail of the room she felt was being stamped indelibly in her mind — the paper flowers and china ornaments on the mantel behind the stove, the highly

coloured pictures in their gilt frames, the old-fashioned "castor," the tall glass cake stand, the cheap stiff lace curtains and the bright-flowered wall paper.

"Will you wait here while I see what information I can get from this man. There may be a station near here, and a train into New York to-night."

She waited there at the table, gazing through the window at the darkness outside. A man passed with a lantern. A dog barked somewhere in the distance.

Then he came back into the room. "There's a station only a mile and a half from here, but there's no train to-night — nothing until five in the morning."

He was waiting for her to make some observation.

"Not until five in the morning?" she repeated vaguely.

"I can see no other way but to stay here. They've only one spare room, but I can lie here on the lounge."

He paused. "Of course, if you've anything else to suggest — if you think you're strong

enough to drive to the next town, we might get a train there, but it's very dark and there's no moon. It might be difficult —"

"Yes, it would be difficult — we'd better stay here."

He flushed quickly, but the sarcasm in her words had been unintentional.

The woman came in now. "The fire's already laid in the spare room, sir. I'll go touch it off if you're decidin' to stay."

"Yes, we'll stay," briefly. Then he turned to Margaret. "Perhaps you'd like to go up now; you'll need the rest. We'll have to leave here at 4:30 to make that five o'clock train."

"Right up this way, ma'am," said the woman. "I'll show you the room."

At the door, Margaret turned back and glanced at him.

"Good-night," she said vaguely.

"Good-night."

When the woman had lit the fire and gone, Margaret sat down on the edge of the bed and gazed around at the shabby low-ceilinged room. And this was the ending of the day, the day that had begun so full of joyous expectance. It seemed

months since she had answered the telephone in her apartment that morning.

She lay down now with a stupefied sense of weariness. Her eyes ached and burned behind their sockets — even the muscles of her face ached. She could think no more now. The imperative need for sleep was mercifully stronger than everything else.

When she awoke, the lamp had burned low and the room was filled with an odour of burnt wick and coal-oil. The place was very still — the stillness of a late hour. She went over to the window and drew up the halting ragged shade. There was no moon; the blackness was impenetrable except where the faint light from under the window lay in a pale streak across the ground and the wooden walk beneath.

She went back and again sat down on the edge of the bed. The lamp was flickering out now, throwing quivering shadows over the shabby wall and floor. For the first time since that morning her mind seemed clear — the real meaning of the day came to her. The rapidity of incidents, the emotional stress, her hurt pride and almost childish indignation, had, until now, blinded her to the real horror and pity of it all.

She saw now, in his drinking, only another inevitable result of the torturing strain he had been under so long. His depression had been growing for weeks, and now this was only another development. It came to her, as it never had before — all the weakening, *wrecking* effects of their love.

The immediate cause of this particular incident was only a detail — the night before made sleepless by the reproaches of his wife, and then the trip on the train without breakfast. He had probably felt the need of more strength and endurance for the long drive before them and had sought to throw off his weariness by the stimulation of liquor. That its effect should have been so pronounced only proved its use was not habitual. She had never before noticed the slightest trace of it on his breath. But now — what would the future hold? Might he not turn again and again to the stimulating effects of alcohol as a relief from the almost unendurable conditions of his life?

She was filled with an uncontrollable desire to go to him, to put her arms about him, to shield him, as it were, from the horror of this thing. All her bitter resentment was forgotten now in a great sense of tenderness and pity.

Where was he? He was somewhere in that still house. There was something weird and fearful about the silence and that flickering lamp. She opened the door softly and listened. There was no sound except her own creaking step. Slowly she felt her way along the black narrow hall. Her groping hand found the bannister and followed it down the steps.

At the end of the hall below was a dim smoking lamp. The door of the front room was partly open; the gleaming white keys of the organ stood out in the darkness like the teeth of some snarling monster. Her heart was beating fearfully. What had been only an irresistible impulse to go to him, now became almost a panic-stricken fear.

An overcoat that hung from a rack in the hall brushed her face as she turned. It was his — even in the dark she knew! She buried her face in the soft satin lining — it seemed to envelope her, to fall lovingly around her. A tremor swept through her at the faint fragrance of tobacco that it held. Where was he? Why did he not come to her? Was he in there? She turned the knob noiselessly. The only light in the room came from the open door of the stove, but it shone

directly on his face as he leaned back in a large arm chair.

He started up, throwing his cigar in the fire. For a second he stood there uncertainly. . . . Then she was in his arms. Who had made the first movement, neither of them knew. It was like a blinding flash of light; when it had passed he was again in the chair holding her in his arms, her face hid against his shoulder and his lips resting on her hair. The room was again in stillness except for the faint roaring of the fire in the chimney and the rattle of a window by the wind.

The sense of peace and contentment and languor that came from the strength and security of his arms was creeping over her like a narcotic. Her doubts and fears of a few moments before for the time were silenced. The comfort and assurance of his love, of his physical strength and presence, were with her again.

Once she raised her hand and timidly touched his face and neck. Even the feel of the stiff edge of his collar, the soft silky tie, the rough cloth of his coat, thrilled her with a sense of his personality.

Her thoughts drifted dreamily back over the first months of their wanderings, the crowded

east-side streets, the shrill cries of children, the haunting murmur of myriad lives. And then came memories of hours by the sea-shore, the glint of waves, the blue of summer skies, the distant white of sails, the stretch of sandy beach, the hotels gay with awnings and flags and bands.

He was gazing steadily into the fire. Was his mind, too, filled with these same pictures? Now and then, as if in response to some tender thought or memory, his arms would draw her closer.

In the silence and tenderness of this hour she knew they were nearer together, happier than they had been for months. If she could only *hold* those moments, keep them from passing. But even then, from some far-off barnyard, came the faint crow of a cock, a melancholy warning of the dawn, the morning that would bring back all the difficulties and estrangements of their position. She clung to him with a passionate longing for some assurance of the permanency of this hour, yet knowing that its very preciousness would make it only the more fleeting.

XVII

THE WOMAN'S ULTIMATE DEMAND

FOR days after the trip in the country he was more gentle, more thoughtful; he seemed to make a greater effort to conquer his depression and moodiness than ever before. He had divined her fears and was trying to quiet them, to show her that the incidents of the trip were purely an accident and one that would not be repeated.

For this assurance Margaret was very grateful. She tried to accept it without reservations; but she felt that a crisis had been reached. More and more she felt the impossibility of their going on much longer as they were. For the first time she admitted to herself that, at whatever cost, she wanted him to give up everything and come to her.

She had gradually withdrawn from all social life, living only for the few hours he could be with her, and, in the intervals between, for his notes and telephone messages. Much of the time she was ill, ill with a feverish unrest, with the

wearing strain of their relations, with constant fruitless brooding.

As he saw her health and courage failing, he did what he could to cheer and comfort her. He was with her as often as possible and wrote and telephoned her constantly. But he did it at the expense of his work and peace at home.

With a feverish anxiety Margaret now began to want some definite assurance for the future, some definite promise that sooner or later he would secure his freedom and be with her always. But this assurance he could not give.

He knew that unconsciously she was now blaming him for the very things he had at the beginning feared that she would — for the absorption of her youth and love when he could give so little in return. He had told her then that he was hopelessly bound, and that he saw no way out. But then she had felt that she would be content and happy with just his love. And now she was not content. She wanted more — a great deal more She wanted all that he had said he could not give, all that every natural woman wants of the man she loves — that he should make her his wife and shield and care for her in the security of a home.

It was the woman's inevitable demand for the whole of the man. She can only delude herself for a time that she will be satisfied with less.

With Margaret that time had now passed. He knew that her demand would come soon, that she could not much longer crush it down. And he realised his utter inability to meet it.

It came one afternoon when he found her in a mood of unusual agitation brought on by sleepless nights and incessant brooding. She burst into a passion of tears, sobbing out that she did not have the courage to go on alone any longer.

"I've tried — oh, you don't know how I've tried! But I haven't the strength or the courage. You must do something to help me — I can't bear it any longer. Oh, I can't — I *can't!*"

Before this passionate outbreak he stood helplessly silent.

At length he asked brokenly, "What can I do, Margaret? What do you *want* me to do?"

"Give up everything and come to me! It is the only way," she sobbed.

"How can I leave her now? I cannot leave her penniless."

"And you put money before my happiness."

"I must — the money I owe her."

"But it isn't as if it was really *her* money — it's only money that you made and gave her."

"You know how I feel about that. It was her share of my income; I can never think of it differently."

"Oh, I know," despairingly. "I know you are right; I could not want you to feel otherwise. But when you've made that back — when all that is straightened out — Oh, if I could only have something to look forward to — something definite to hold to!"

"Don't, Margaret, don't force me to make any definite promise that I'll leave her. I'd feel even more contemptible than I do now, knowing that I'd deliberately pledged myself to sacrifice her. If the time comes when we are swept off our feet . . . But to plan it in this deliberate, cold-blooded way! You promised once to help me protect her — to be content with just my love — never to ask this of me."

"I know — I know I did," she moaned. "And I meant it — I was stronger then. But now — now I have no strength left."

"Then don't try to weaken me, Margaret. Let me keep what little I still have."

For several moments he gazed moodily before

him, then suddenly dropped his head in his hands.

"It looks so black — so hopeless!"

His voice, the droop of his shoulders, his bowed head, stirred something deep in Margaret's heart. She saw the greyness around his temples. It had not been there two years ago, and now — it whitened daily. A lump rose in her throat. She went over and knelt beside him. He did not move; it was some time before she spoke.

"I'm going to try to be more patient and not worry you so! Oh, I'll try, dear — I *will!*"

"It isn't that — you do try. I know you do. And I suppose you can't help it when you break down. I know how hard it must be for you — but what can I do? *What can I do?*"

He rose abruptly and put her from him almost roughly. "Let's not talk about it. It never helps, it only makes it harder for us both."

He walked nervously up and down the room and then paused by a table and picked up a magazine.

"I can only stay a little while. Let me read to you — it will be better than this hopeless discussion." He was turning through the magazine. "Don't you want to lie here on the couch?" He drew up a low chair beside her.

Margaret knew that she would be unable to fix her mind on anything he might read, but she leaned back obediently among the pillows. He was still turning absently through the magazine. Then she saw him start, his eyes fixed on a page. Abruptly he closed the magazine and picked up another.

"Here is the last ——'s," his voice was not quite natural. "There'll probably be something in this."

But Margaret had started up nervously. "What was it you saw in that other magazine — why did you drop it so suddenly?"

"There's nothing in it — it's simply a number I've read."

But she had crossed over to the table, picked up the magazine and was searching through the table of contents.

"Listen, Margaret, I can stay only a few moments. We don't want to spend them in any more discussions — it'll only make us both more wretched."

She did not seem to hear him. A swift glance down the table of contents had revealed nothing, and now she was sweeping through the magazine. Suddenly a paragraph stood out.

". . . if another woman should ever become more necessary to his happiness — she had always said she would give him up. Now, after twelve years, the test had come. Was she strong enough? Could she do this thing — give him to another woman? . . . love, real love, meant the happiness of the one loved . . . give up her home . . . each chair seemed a part of her . . . go away alone . . . rest of her life alone . . ."

On the opposite page was a picture of a middle-aged woman stooping over a trunk, the room in the confusion of packing. Underneath were the words, "She would take only this old smoking jacket — that much of him she would carry away."

Margaret raised her eyes and met his.

"It is *this!*"

He did not answer.

She swept back to the first page — the second — the third. In a moment, with her marvellous ability for tearing the heart from a story almost at a glance, she had grasped it all.

"What has happened? It's something more than merely your reading this — she must have —"

"She read it to me," tensely.

"*She read it to you?*"

"She came down to the library one evening and asked if I had time to listen to a short story.

Then she read me that. When she had finished, she laid the magazine on the arm of my chair and went upstairs again. She made no comment on it whatever — her silence was stronger than any comment."

Margaret was clasping and unclasping her hands. "Oh, it must be horrible. I think I begin to realise now just how horrible your life must be. She's always with you — a constant living reproach, making you feel in a thousand ways the strength of her claim. Oh, I can imagine the allusions and references! I can imagine her referring with pretended carelessness to some notorious divorce where the man leaves his wife for an actress or chorus girl. Every newspaper now is full of loathsome accounts of infidelities, of scandals, and divorce. All that is in her favour. I've never spoken of it before — I shrank from referring to it in any way. But you must have felt it, too — the degradation of it all! It seems — Oh, I cannot tell you how I feel about it!"

"I've felt it all, Margaret, but I hoped you had escaped — that it had not affected you in the same way. That's why I've never spoken to you about it."

"How could I escape? I can never pick up a paper without being confronted by some glaring hideous travesty of love — and I throw it down with a fierce hope that you've not seen it too. I've tried not to see those things — tried not to read them. But there are times — oh, I hardly know how to explain it — when they've a sort of horrible fascination for me. The Wenford case — you remember that?"

He nodded.

"For days I followed it — I hated and loathed myself — but I couldn't help it!"

"I know, dear, I think I understand. I've had something of that, too. It's only that we're morbid, that we've brooded over all this too much. It's only another result of the unnaturalness of our lives."

When he was leaving, he picked up the magazine.

"I want to take this with me, Margaret; I don't like to think of your reading it now."

"I might as well read it as to lie awake all night wondering what is in it — imagining much more than it could possibly contain."

"Yes, I suppose so." He laid the book back with a sigh.

That night Margaret read the story again and again with a feverish intensity. It was by a well-known writer of short stories, and was written with unusual skill.

The theme was in no way new or original, and there was no attempt to make it so. It was simply, but strongly written. It was the story of a woman past middle age, who, after twelve tranquil years with her husband, discovers that he loves another woman, and that for her sake he is fighting against it and trying to crush it out.

Many times during those years she had said proudly, in the security of his love, that if it ever ceased to be love, that if another woman ever took her place in his heart, she would want him to have her. She would go away — she would give him up.

The scene in which the wife finally decides to live up to this, now that the test has come, was very strong. The description of her packing was vividly real — of her going over the house, taking good-bye of each room, each piece of furniture which from all these years of possession had become a part of her. All these she would leave, she would take only her personal clothing, nothing of his except the old smoking jacket. She

had told herself that she would take one — just one thing that belonged to him. And after a heart-breaking hour in his room she catches up a worn smoking jacket and buries her face against it. If only it would hold always that odour of tobacco! If she might always have something that would bring him back to her so vividly. She gathers up a handful of cigars from a box on the table and slips them into the coat pocket. In the loneliness of the years to come, she will bury her face in that coat and it will still have that odour — it will still seem almost as though his arms were around her.

She packs the coat in the bottom of her trunk with all his photographs that she had gathered from all over the house. These at least belong to her, she tells herself passionately, for they were taken when *he* belonged to her. All of her pictures she takes — all except one, and that, after a struggle she leaves. It is an old-fashioned picture of a young girl in a muslin gown, taken when they were engaged. The woman he loves now could not be fairer than she was then! She glances at her poor lined face in the mirror. Oh, what a pitiless thing is age to a woman — age that fades and withers. It is because of this

that her husband now loves a younger, fresher face.

The story ends with a dramatic, almost a melodramatic, incident, which brings out the light, frivolous, selfish nature of the other woman, and brings to the man a consciousness that his love for her is only an infatuation. He follows his wife and brings her back to their home with a deeper realisation of his need of her.

For days this story haunted Margaret. She tried to escape it — to put it aside. But the picture of the middle-aged woman stooping over the trunk was always before her. All her former ideas and conceptions of his wife now seemed to fade away, and in her mind it was that woman by the trunk who was his wife. Again and again she pictured her going through the house, taking leave of all the things that had made up her life for so long.

With her vivid, persistent imagination, she lived through what this woman must have suffered in the past two years, with the ever-increasing fear that she was losing her husband, that he was growing away from her, and that she no longer had youth or beauty with which to hold him.

For the first time Margaret realised the full strength of his wife's claim — the claim of all those years. She understood, as never before, his efforts to shield her; and something of what he felt when he said "How can I leave her — a woman with whom I have lived for fifteen years, a good woman who is dependent on me for her happiness?"

She *would* help him shield her, she would crush out all bitterness and jealousy, she would acknowledge and respect this woman's claim. She remembered with a fervid sense of gratitude that he had said a few days ago: "She is more content now than she had been for months, for she feels that I no longer see you."

She would do nothing to disturb this contentment, she would be satisfied with less than she had ever had, would see him less, take less of his time.

And all this she did to silence something within her, something before which she blanched and quivered, something that said there was only one way, only one thing that was *right* — to go away — to give him up altogether. Desperately she strove to crush out this thought, to appease it by any other sacrifice.

All the ways in which she had justified her position in these two years seemed painfully inadequate now. Her vindications seemed the shallowest sophistries. She tried to strengthen them, to reassure herself, to get back some of her old beliefs and convictions; but now they eluded her. Everything seemed slipping away. The stronghold of her defence had at last been assailed.

XVIII

DESPERATION

THE change in Margaret's attitude was very marked. She was now very patient and uncomplaining. She seemed no longer to rebel at her position; the feverish discontent was suddenly arrested. In many ways she made him feel the lessening of her demands.

But her heart contracted with pain when she saw with what relief he accepted this change, how quickly he availed himself of his greater freedom, with what readiness he acquiesced in any suggestion from her that he should be with her less, that he should give more time to his work.

She had once seen a play, a powerful play, in which the problem dealt with was the triangle, and in which the man's love for the woman who was not his wife had ceased, but he felt himself forced to keep up the pretence to her, just as he tried to keep it up with his wife. In some ways he felt his duty and obligation to

this other woman more strongly than if their tie had been a legal one, that he owed it to her to keep up the pretence even more than he owed it to his wife. There were many things beside love that he gave his wife — the prestige and protection of his name, the security of his home. But all he could give this other woman was love — she had sacrificed everything for that. Could he take it from her now?

At the time, the play had made upon Margaret a strong impression, and now came the thought that Graham's love might too have become a pretence, a pretence laboriously kept up through a chivalrous sense of loyalty. But this thought was only fleeting; her assurance in the strength and permanency of his love was too deeply rooted to be suddenly shaken. Yet some tendrils of such a fear had fastened themselves around her heart; she could not tear them all away. Now and then she would feel their grip as she saw some new proof of his willingness to remain away — to see her less and less.

"It's only because of his work — because he's neglected it for so long," she would tell herself with a passionate conviction. And yet — again and again she felt the clutch of that fearful doubt.

With a stronger self-control than she had ever before exerted, she allowed these doubts and fears no outward expression; she refrained from making any "tests" of his love, a thing a few weeks ago she would have done with hysterical frequency.

Repeatedly she told herself that she must not allow anything to weaken her resolutions — the picture of that woman by the trunk was still very vivid, the realisation of her claim was still very strong. And there was beside the feeling that the anguish she felt whenever this thought of his waning love possessed her, was only a little of what his wife must have felt as for months she had watched him growing away from her.

This forced repression, this constant eating out of her heart alone was even worse for Margaret's health than it had been when she gave vent to her emotions, when she sobbed out her unhappiness in his arms. Her mirror reflected a face that was becoming daily more wan and colourless — yet he did not seem to see it. She was ever torturing herself with the thought that if he loved her — could he be so indifferent to her health?

Over a month had passed in this way, when

something happened that broke down her self-control, shattered her resolutions and brought back all the old feeling of bitterness and revolt.

It had been four days since she had seen him, and to-night he was to take her to dinner. They had not dined together for several weeks, and now she looked forward to it with eager longing and with the hope that it might bring them nearer. She reached the elevated station, where they were to meet, a few moments early. She waited at the far end of the platform, looking down on the crowded street.

Then she became conscious that a man was walking back and forth staring at her steadily. Annoyed, she moved nearer the railing. But he continued to walk by, passing so near that he brushed her dress, and tapping his cane lightly on the ground. A train drew up, but he made no effort to take it, and Margaret realised that he might think her own waiting was to encourage him. Another train passed and as Margaret still waited, he thought his conquest was complete. He stepped to her side, raised his hat and said "Good evening."

Without glancing toward him, Margaret swept

past, back into the waiting room. Her face was crimson and her breath came fast. Her fierce indignation was not only against the man who had spoken to her, but also against the one for whom she was waiting, who allowed her to meet him at elevated and subway stations, thus exposing her to the possibility of such insults.

At first he had been very reluctant to have her meet him in this way, but lately he had come to take it for granted. Had she made a mistake? In her eagerness to make things less difficult, she had protested that she was willing to meet him anywhere, that, as she understood the need, she would not feel the humiliation. But after all does not a woman cheapen herself by any concession of this kind? Would he not, perhaps, have valued her more if she had made him feel that she could not do this — if she had held herself more aloof? The very difficulties in the way of seeing her would have made him only the more determined to overcome them.

At that moment she felt keenly the humiliation not only of her willingness to meet him in this way, but of many other concessions that she had made to facilitate their being together — to make it less difficult for him. It seemed to

her now that she had tried to smooth the way by countless concessions of her pride and reserve. And how serenely he had come to accept these concessions — with how few protests!

Just then, through the open door that led out to the platform, she saw him step from the train. He looked up and down the platform, glancing at his watch, and finally saw her through the door.

She told him at once of the incident — of the insolent confidence with which the man had spoken to her. She made no attempt to conceal her agitation or her bitterness. But even as he expressed his regret that it should have happened, and said they must find some way of meeting that she would not be so exposed, she was conscious of the most poignant disappointment. There was something lacking in his concern. It was, of course, not quite perfunctory, but it did not ring with the tense solicitude that he would have felt a year ago.

All through the dinner it seemed to Margaret that he was farther from her than ever before. It had been four days since he had seen her, and yet he had nothing, almost nothing, to say. Part of the time he seemed preoccupied, almost

to absent-mindedness; and again it was as though he were making an effort to keep the conversation confined to the commonplace, to avoid anything that might lead to personalities.

Margaret herself felt too heartsick, too bitterly disappointed, to make any effort to keep up even a pretence at conversation. She merely toyed with the food before her; it was almost impossible to swallow past the lump in her throat. But he failed to notice that she did not eat. The waiter removed her plates almost untouched, but still he did not notice.

There had been a long silence, when suddenly he leaned forward and said quietly, a slow, low-voiced quietness which with him always meant suppression.

"Margaret, I'm going to ask something of you. I hope you'll not press me for the reason and that you'll believe that it is as much for your sake as for — any one else!"

She looked at him wonderingly. A short pause, then he said abruptly,

"Will you go out of the city for a few days? Some nearby resort — any place where you'll be comfortable?"

He was waiting for her to speak, but she only gazed at him. Still he waited.

"I don't think I understand." Her lips were colourless.

"No. I suppose I'll have to tell you the reason." He paused. "Lately we've not discussed these things, and you've seemed less feverishly discontented, more reconciled. That's why I'm loath to bring up anything that may agitate you now. And yet I cannot ask this of you without giving you the reason. It's to save you from a painful meeting with — Mrs. Whitman. She is coming to see you."

"*Coming to see me!*"

"I'm afraid so."

"What do you mean? What has happened?"

"I shall not go into details, Margaret. I can only say that she has found out I still see you, and is taking this last desperate means to separate us."

"Oh, would she do a thing so — undignified?"

He was silent.

"And you want me to go away to prevent it?"

"I think it will be best."

"Best for *her!*" passionately. "You're afraid

for her to see me — afraid I'll tell her the *truth!* It's she you're always trying to shield — it's always she!"

"It's both of you. Do you realise what it would mean if she should come? Could you ever forget it? Can't you see I'm trying to save you *that?*"

There flashed before Margaret the possibility of what it would mean — of the horror of meeting this woman. What would it be like? Would she come to denounce, to threaten or to implore — to plead with her to give up this man who was her husband? Her mind was filled with scenes — detailed, vivid, harrowing scenes.

She was gazing down in her lap, alternately crushing and straining at the napkin that lay there.

"How — how did this happen? We've been together so little — less than ever before — why should this happen now?"

"I told you I wouldn't go into details, Margaret. It never helps. I've done far too much of that in the past. It's enough that she should suffer without my describing her suffering to you."

It seemed to Margaret that with every word he was drawing farther away from her. She was filled with a cold desolation, a sense of standing alone — more alone than she had ever stood before.

"I've asked this of you, Margaret, only because I wanted to save you both from something that could only be most harrowing. You may think it not necessary to go out of town — that you could merely refuse to see any one that might call. But there's the possibility that in some way she might elude the bell boys and come direct to your rooms. However, I shall not try to persuade you. Now that you know, you must do as you think best."

"And when do you want me to go?" in a low voice.

"If you go at all, it should be at once — in the morning."

"Very well. I'll go." It was hardly more than a whisper.

He started to speak, and then paused as the waiter came up to remove their plates. Margaret gazed down the long café. The mirrors, the lights, the gay groups of people — it all

seemed to blur before her, the whole scene seemed unreal and far away, as though she were gazing at it from some great distance.

"If I could help you more in this, I would. But there are circumstances, which I would rather not discuss, that make it impossible."

In silent acquiescence Margaret made the slightest inclination of her head. Her eyes were fixed on the pale yellow wine in her glass; then she raised it and drank it all. And when a few moments later the waiter refilled the glass, she drained it again.

When they rose from the table, she saw him glance at his watch.

"I suppose you know it will be impossible now for me to spend the rest of the evening with you. I can only take you home."

Again she only nodded.

It was not until they were almost to her apartment that she realised all that his silence meant. He was going to leave her like this — without planning or even asking where she was to go — without saying that in a few days he would come after her. He was leaving her without her even knowing when or where she would see him again!

She clenched her hands and pressed her hot face against the cool glass of the cab window. It was a familiar street they were passing, a street through which they had often wandered. That quaint chop house on the corner — how vividly came back a cold, snowy night when they had stopped there for a steaming hot punch. He had drawn off her gloves tenderly and chafed her hands, not only because they were cold but because he wanted to hold them. And that square with the lights shining through the dark trees — how often they had walked through there. And now — now he was sitting beside her with a cold remoteness that was terrifying.

No — no, he could not leave her like this! He was waiting until the last moment, until they were almost to her door, but then he would make some plan, he would advise her where to go — he would say that he would come after her.

A dark church spire loomed before them — just three more squares! She caught her breath — two more — one more! And still he was silent! The cab drew up. He helped her out. Motioning the cabman to wait, he walked with her up the steps.

"There's nothing I can say to-night, Margaret,

that would help either of us. I don't know when I can see you. It will be harder now than ever before. You'll have to be patient — there is no other way. I'll see you as soon as I can after you return. Under the circumstances, it would be better if you did not write, but if you do, have the envelope typewritten and address it to the office."

A brief good-bye and he was gone.

Crouched on the floor by the window, Margaret had not moved since she entered her rooms. The place was dark; she had not waited to turn on the lights as she rushed to the window for a last straining glance after his cab. She had not even removed her hat, and yet an hour had passed.

An hour in which all the resolutions, all the self-control of the last few weeks were swept aside. There alone in the dark, with no sound in the room except her own convulsive sobs, she told herself passionately that because she had tried, because she had made every effort to help him, to demand less and less, to force down her own heartaches and think of those of his wife — this was the result. He was letting the burden

of this exigency fall upon her alone — he was sending her away from him like this!

What was it that had happened? In the confused misery of her mind, that question beat unceasingly. What could have reawakened his wife's suspicions — aroused in her such a desperate resolve and made him so cold and bitter? Instinctively she felt that whatever it was, he thought it was her fault — that was why he had been so hard. *What was it?* What did he think she had done? For what cruel mistake was she to suffer?

And then in a flash she knew — it was her story! *Her story!* After all this time — his wife had at last found the magazine! She felt herself in the grip of a relentless inexorable fate.

If it had come before, when his love was unwavering — but now, *now* when she felt he was growing away from her! This had come now to further estrange them — to weaken his faith in her and strengthen his pity for his wife! Oh, it was fate — fate — a pitiless fate!

She rose, stumbling across the room to turn on the lights; the darkness had suddenly be-

come intolerable — it filled her now with a sort of terror. Her foot caught on a small stool that lay in the way; she fell, striking her forehead sharply on the arm of a chair. For a moment she lay stunned, then rose blindly to her feet, the pain in her head adding to the unreasoning sense of fright.

The days that must pass before she could see him! The long hours she must spend alone — the fearful anguished hours, every moment filled with torturing thoughts and doubts. She could not live through those days! He must help her! She must see him again — *now! He must help her!*

Desperately, and yet with a feeling that something was clutching at her, holding her back, she rushed to the 'phone. No — no, she could not call up from here — the girl at the switchboard down-stairs was always listening. She must go to some outside 'phone where she was not known.

Margaret seemed now to be swept along by some irresistible force outside herself. Already she was in the hall, down the elevator and out into the street.

The telephone at the corner drug store was

on a stand by the door. There was no booth and the clerk would hear everything that was said. But she knew of no other place near, and her desire to reach him at once was now an obsession.

For all these months she had been so careful about 'phoning to his house; she had always felt the risk and guarded against it. But she was utterly reckless now. Her mind held no thought but the feverish consuming desire to reach him — to tell him he must come to her — that he must help her!

She could hear a buzzing in the 'phone which she knew meant the ringing of his number. There was a long throbbing wait — and then —

"Hello!" It was a *woman's* voice! Was it hers? "Hello." The voice called again and still again, before Margaret could force the words:

"I wish to speak to Mr. Whitman."

There was no answer, only a sound as though the receiver had been dropped. Another throbbing silence.

"Hello!" It was *his* voice now.

"I can't bear it," incoherently. "You should not have left me like that. I must see you again

—*now!* You must help me—you must come to me—if only for a moment!"

"That is impossible!" There was a strange muffled note in his voice.

"You must—you must—I can't stand it! I must see you!"

"I tell you it's impossible."

"No—no—don't say that! Graham, listen—you *must* come—you . . ."

A faint click in the 'phone.

"Hello! Hello!" in quivering fear.

But there was only an abysmal silence.

He had hung up the receiver—he had deliberately cut her off! The hot blood scorched her face. She hurried blindly out of the store, away from the glaring lights and inquisitive eyes of the clerk.

Central might have cut them off! She caught at the thought with desperate hope. But she must be certain. If he had done it purposely . . . She would telephone once more, regardless of consequences. She must *know!*

There was a drug store a few blocks farther on—a large store where they had booths. In her feverish haste she almost ran. She reached the place only to be told the booths closed at

eight o'clock, but there was a telephone on the cashier's desk. A number of people were in the store. No — no, she could not 'phone before so many — she must go somewhere else.

She would take a cab to some large hotel where there would surely be booths. But no cab was in sight. She rushed on, hardly conscious of her feeling of impotent, helpless rage at conditions. The red-banded window of a cigar store shone from the next corner. Without stopping to think she ran in.

"Have you a telephone booth?" breathlessly.

The man looked at her for a moment. There must have been something in her evident excitement and distress that appealed to him, for he said courteously,

"Yes, we have one. It is usually closed after eight, but you can use it if you wish."

She murmured her thanks as he unlocked the door of the booth, entered and closed it after her. Her hand trembled so she could hardly take down the receiver.

"3240 River!"

In the moment that followed she tried frantically to bring some order out of the chaos of her thoughts.

"Hello! There's your party," Central called stridently.

"Hello!" His voice, but with the same strange note.

"Did you ring off purposely a few moments ago?" Margaret caught her breath. "Or was it a mistake — was it Central?"

"I don't know," it was a hoarse muffled undertone.

"You don't know? What do you mean?"

There was no answer.

"What do you mean? *What do you mean?*" Her voice rose in quivering excitement.

"I mean that you're precipitating a crisis."

"A crisis? What has happened! Don't torture me like this. Tell me!"

"I cannot."

"Then you must come to me now! I cannot bear it. Graham! Graham! Think what you're doing! I never asked you to come to me before — surely you owe me that much!" The words ended in a choking sob.

"Mrs. Whitman is here, in this room." He spoke now with a sort of terrible distinctness. "She has been here all along. She has heard everything that has been said and knows who

it is that is telephoning. Now do you want to say anything more?"

"Yes. I want to say that you must come to me now. If you never come again — I ask that you come now!"

"I cannot." Then again that faint click in the 'phone. This time there was no doubt — he had hung up the receiver!

There was a red blur before her eyes as she once more called Central.

"That number — 3240 River — will you call that again?"

He should hear her! He should know what she was going to do. Nothing he could say now would make any difference. She would not give him time to say anything. *She* would hang up the receiver this time. And then . . .

"I'm ringing 3240 River," shrilled Central. "They don't answer."

"Ring them again — you must get them!"

Another beating silence that seemed to paralyse her whole trembling, weakened body as she leaned against the side of the booth for support.

"3240 River don't answer," called Central with a note of finality.

He knew she was calling — and he was *refus-*

ing to answer the telephone. It had come to that!

She was only vaguely conscious of leaving the booth and paying for the call. Outside the long line of street lamps blurred indistinctly before her. She made her way back to the drug store, swaying a little as she walked. But when she asked the clerk for four ounces of laudanum, her voice was firm and clear. Laudanum was certain and merciful — it brought only an unending sleep.

"Have you a prescription?" the clerk asked courteously.

"I didn't think it was necessary for laudanum."

"What is it to be used for?"

Why had she not anticipated that question? She was compelled to hesitate as she tried to force from her mind some plausible use. The clerk glanced at her keenly.

"I'm afraid I cannot sell it to you without a prescription."

What was laudanum used for? She repeated it over and over as she dragged herself on to the next drug store. A mind's picture of her mother's medicine chest came before her. There

was always a small bottle with a brown stained label marked — laudanum. Even the odour and bitter taste of the dark liquid came back to her. As a child — what had it been given her for? And then the picture was complete — her mother had the bottle in one hand and a cotton-covered toothpick in the other.

She met the clerk's query at the next drug store with the reply that it was for an ulcerated tooth. He gave it to her, but made her sign her name and address in a register of poisons.

And now as she turned back to her apartment she was filled with the consciousness that it was over — there would be no more suffering, no more anxiety and suspense. All the misery and heartaches of the last few months would be ended. She looked down at the neat little package in her hand. Within its white wrapping and pink string lay — oblivion.

In the many times she had thought of this lately, there had always been the dramatic element in it. She had always dwelt with a certain emotional pleasure on how he would throw himself by her lifeless body in his anguished remorse that he had not sacrificed everything to keep her with him before it was too late.

But now she did not think of that. She thought only of oblivion, of rest, of cessation of thought. She would not even take the trouble to leave a note or arrange things in any way. As soon as she reached her rooms she would throw off her wraps, drink the laudanum, and then lie down — for an unending rest.

She held the bottle closer; the thought that she might drop it or spill it filled her with terror. There was a feeling of security, of certainty, in the four ounces, although she knew it would be more than was needed.

The events of the last hour seemed very remote now. The hotel loomed before her in the next block strangely unfamiliar, as though a great length of time had elapsed since she had left.

She did not even see the dark figure walking up and down before the entrance. She was on the steps when she started back with a muffled scream. He was beside her! His eyes gleamed unnaturally dark from the pallor of his face.

Without a word he took the bottle from her clinging grasp and tore off the wrapper. The light from the doorway fell on the label. Then she heard a crash far out in the street.

Roughly he caught her arm and led her up

the steps and into the elevator. He threw open the door of her apartment; she had not troubled to lock it when she left. She sank into a chair and covered her face.

"And that was your solution? That was your conception of revenge? You thought to put an everlasting remorse into my life. But it would *not* have been remorse! It would have been contempt — contempt for your weakness!"

She cowered before him, shrinking farther back into her chair.

"You told me if things ever came to a crisis that you would help me, that if absolutely necessary you would be content not to see me for days. And now — because I could not come to you to-night, because on your account an innocent woman has been driven to desperation, to a condition so pitiful that mere humanity would force me to stay by her side — this is how you would have helped me!"

She rose, turned blindly toward the other room as though to flee from his reproaches, and then from very weakness sank into another chair. After a long silence, he said less harshly, but with an inflexible coldness in his voice:

"This morning she received through the mail

a marked magazine containing your story and an anonymous letter."

Margaret dropped her hands and turned her face toward him.

"An anonymous letter!"

"An anonymous letter, implying very clearly what that story was based on."

"No — no! No one could have done that — no one knew."

He laughed harshly. "It seems that some one does know — and that they know a great deal."

She caught her breath. "And you thought only of shielding *her?* You had no thought of me — of what any publicity would mean to me?"

"It will not be a matter of publicity. If it is, you probably know I'll shield you at any cost. But I did not owe it to you to leave her alone in the condition she is now. I came to-night only because of the fear that you would do some reckless thing. She knows that I'm here."

"*She knows that you're here!*"

"She was in the room when you telephoned. For some reason the receiver gave out the sound — your voice could be heard all over the room. I tried to cut off — and you rang up again. I left her hysterical, with only a maid. But I

promised that after to-night I would never see or communicate with you again."

"Then she knows . . . You admitted . . ."

"I admitted nothing. She heard what you said over the 'phone."

"And you mean — you intend to keep that promise?" she whispered.

He did not answer.

"Graham!" Even her lips were white now. "You don't mean that? You can't . . ."

He turned on her fiercely. "Have I ever kept it before? How many times have I made her that promise? And have I ever kept it? She says this is final, that if I ever see you again she will leave me in twenty-four hours. And yet you know I'll keep on taking the risk. You know I haven't the strength to stay away from you long."

"Oh, don't say it like that — don't make me feel . . ."

"How do you expect me to say it? What have you done to-night but deliberately try to wreck everything? Even after I told you she was there in the room, you rang again and again. She said she would walk out of the house then — if I answered that telephone again!"

"Oh, don't — don't — I can't bear it!" She dropped her head on the arm of the chair.

He waited until the paroxysm of sobs had passed and then said coldly,

"It's useless to cry. I can feel no sympathy for you now. I owe that poor woman something. The thought of how you have deliberately hurt and humiliated her may enable me to stay away from you for a while."

"I told you how I wrote that story and how I regretted it. Do you think it will help her for you to taunt me with it now?"

"No, it will not help her," he answered dully.

"I did not write that in the spirit you think — I didn't want to hurt her. Won't you believe me — won't you believe that I mean that?"

"You probably mean that now."

"Oh, you don't believe me," she moaned. "I know you don't believe me."

"Margaret, it isn't a question of my belief in your motives," he answered wearily. "The results remain the same: the suffering and humiliation that story has caused her — the needless suffering. What we have done in the past I have tried to justify because I felt that we could not help it — that our love swept everything be-

fore it. But this — this seems so deliberate, so wantonly cruel."

"Oh, don't — don't say that!" She put out her hands.

Only the flapping of a window shade broke the stillness that followed.

"Your love for me is dead!" There was a note of finality in the misery of her voice.

"Love does not die so quickly. But there is nothing I can say now that will help either of us. You had better let me go, Margaret."

She was watching him now with straining fearful eyes. "You mean — you think it *right* to leave me like this — to leave me indefinitely like this?"

"I haven't thought of it as a matter of right or wrong; that phase of it would not influence me now. It is simply a matter of humanity. You've brought upon her this needless suffering and humiliation, and I must do what I can to make it less. I owe her that much."

"And you owe me nothing?"

"Margaret, can't you see the uselessness, the futility, of all these discussions?"

"Oh, I cannot bear it!" She groped her way to him through blinding tears. "You must not

leave me like this," she sobbed. "I cannot bear it — I cannot bear it!"

But she felt that his arms held her only that she might not fall; there was in them no warmth or love. He stood quite motionless, cold, unyielding. She felt that he was wondering when she would let him go — when her torturing importunities would cease. But even as she realised the futility of her efforts, she could not relinquish them. She tried to draw his head down to hers, to press her tear-wet face against his.

At length he said in a voice of utter weariness:

"If you'll only let me go quietly, Margaret. I tell you frankly that just now the sight of emotion repels me. I've been through too much of it to-day. I'm sick of tears and agitations. I feel that I cannot stand any more."

With a muffled cry she released him and sank back against the wall. Without a word he turned to the door. A second later it closed after him.

XIX

THE PRICE INEVITABLE

UNHEEDING the fine mist that was falling when he reached the street, he hurried on with bent head and tense set features. A shrieking fire engine swept by with a shower of sparks, but he did not look up. The hose and ladder wagons followed with thundering hoofs. A crowd of small boys came rushing after, gleeful in their shrill excitement. He turned down a quiet street.

A sound of a stifled sob — and some one grasped his arm. He turned. Margaret's white face was beside him.

"Are you *mad?*"

She stood there bare-headed, the mist falling on her hair and thin light dress. Both hands were clenched tight over her heart.

"You must come back with me!"

He did not speak.

"You must come back with me!"

"If you force me to go back with you now," — each word was like a slow lash,—"*it will be for the last time.*"

"You must come back with me!"

He turned and walked beside her, saying no word to her.

Another engine swept by. They were only a block from the hotel, a block over which Margaret had fled in a breathless moment. But now they seemed to be walking on and on. He did not take her arm; he made no effort to shield her from the misting rain.

For the second time that night the hotel loomed before her, dark and menacing. The steps — the hall — the elevator — her rooms at last.

"No — no, you must not look at me like that! I couldn't help it — I *had* to go after you! I couldn't let you leave me like that — I couldn't bear the thought of to-night and to-morrow and the next day — all the long hours living it over and over!"

"And what will you gain by this?"

"Oh, I thought you might understand — that you might be kinder —"

"That I might be affected by your melodramat-

ics? Don't you think we've had enough of them to-night? Will you let me go now?"

She took a step forward — her face whiter than he had ever seen it.

"Graham," she whispered, "*don't you know why — why I've lost my self-control. . . . Why I cling to you so desperately . . .*"

For a moment she stood before him. Then with a strangled sob, she dropped to the floor.

"What do you mean?" huskily.

Her only answer was a tightened clenching of her hands as they lay out upon the rug.

From the street came the sound of returning engines, swelling to a loud rush as they passed, and growing gradually fainter again in the distance. Then she felt his arms around her. He laid her on the couch and knelt beside her. At last he spoke.

"Margaret, I'm ready to do whatever you ask."

She lay with her face turned from him.

"I'll come in the morning. You can tell me then what you wish — what plans you think best."

"What plans I wish?" she whispered. "Have *you* no plans — no wishes?"

"We are under too much strain to talk or think clearly to-night. If you'll wait until morning — I'll try not to fail you in any way then."

Her face was still turned from him. For a while he knelt there beside her, his head bowed on his hand. At length he rose. He stooped over and kissed her very gently.

"I'll come in the morning. Try to sleep — to forget everything until then." He waited a moment as though unwilling to leave her if still she needed him. But she made no motion. Then the door closed softly.

The street noises gradually ceased as the traffic lessened into the night. And still she lay as he had left her, her burning eyes fixed on the wall. The room was tensely still. Only now and then came the sound of some prowling cab. And once the silence was sharply broken by angry drunken voices — some late rioters straggling by. Then came the early morning sounds, the rattling milk cart and noise of street cleaners.

. . . . . .

It was ten o'clock when he came. Two large trunks stood packed in the centre of the room, and Margaret in a travelling suit was seated at her desk clearing out its contents.

She rose as he entered and stood holding to the chair. He was very pale, his eyes dark with a feverish brilliancy. He crossed the room and kissed her gently.

She smiled faintly, "I'm all ready to go."

"To go?" Then he noticed the trunks and the dismantled room. "Margaret, you're not going — now?"

"That was what you wanted yesterday — for me to go away."

"But I don't want that now — surely you know . . ."

She was not looking at him; her head was bent over some papers she was gathering together on the desk.

"What have you done?" Her voice was low, and curiously without expression, but her hands trembled among the papers.

"What have I done?"

"What plans have you made?"

"I have come prepared to meet yours. I told you that last night."

"And if — I have no plans?"

He was silent.

"You've thought of no — no way?"

"I know of but one way — to tell her the

truth — all of it. And ask for my freedom."

"And you think she would give it to you? You never thought so before."

"It is different now."

"Have you told her anything yet?"

"No."

"When will you?"

"At once — if you wish it."

"If I wish it — if *I* wish it! Oh, Graham — Graham, does it mean nothing to *you* — is there nothing voluntary — nothing spontaneous in your attitude? Have you no thrilled thought of the wonder of it — of what it means? Oh, if there was only a single note of what I so long for in your voice!"

"Margaret, I shall do the best I can — everything I can. Don't make it harder than you can help."

"Harder?" She dropped the papers now and faced him, holding tight to the back of the chair. "No — I'm going to make it easier — oh, so much easier! You needn't tell her — you needn't leave her! *It is not true!* I deceived you! It was a last desperate effort to hold you — and it failed. What you offer me now is not from love. Even your voice when you say: 'I will do

whatever you ask' is the voice of one who takes up a burden — who intends to pay unflinchingly the debt he owes!

"I've been blind not to see that for weeks only the ghost of your love was left me. I don't think you knew yourself — memories and ghosts are very strong, and it was those that still held you. And yet I should have known! There were so many things to tell me — your long absences, your willingness to remain away, your reluctance to talk of the future, the long silences when we were together — and oh, so many intangible things! But I didn't know until last night — until you thought . . .

"No — don't — don't speak! I know all you would say — all the contempt you have for this deception. Leave me — now — without putting it into words — that is all I shall ever ask of you! Look — I'm going in here to make it easier!" She turned to the adjoining room. "Now leave — quickly — while I have the strength to let you go!"

She ran into the room and tried to close the door, but the edge of a rug was under it and it would not quite come to. With her hands clasped against her throat, she stood there in

the centre of the room, her eyes fixed on the door.

Somewhere in the floors above, a pianola was playing a strident air. A faint hissing of steam came from the radiator in the corner. But there was no sound from the next room — he was still there — he had not moved! She was not breathing; it was as though even her heart had stopped. What did it mean? Was he hesitating — was he coming to her — could it be . . .

Then she heard his step. The outer door opened and closed. And she knew that the room was empty.

The distant pianola, with a culminative crashing of chords, stopped abruptly. The radiator alternately simmered and thumped. From the street below came the shrill voice of a child at play.

Margaret had not moved; she was still standing there in the centre of the room, still gazing at the edge of the rug that had caught under the door.

"And he will never know," the whispered words came slowly. *"He will never know that it is true."*

THE END

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